

I-Click Photography:  
An Exploration of Student Perspectives on Learning and Engagement

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A Thesis  
In  
The Department  
Of  
Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts (Child Studies) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

December 2015

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# CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

## School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

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Entitled: I-Click Photography: An Exploration of Student Perspectives on Learning and Engagement

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### **Master of Arts in Child Studies**

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## **Abstract**

### **I-Click Photography: An Exploration of Student Perspectives on Learning and Engagement** **Cassandra Monette**

As has been seen in previous research, school engagement is a necessary factor in student success (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Baker, Derrer, Davis, Dinklage-Travis, & Linder, 2001; Boyle & Lipman, 2002; Covell, 2009; Gamoran, 1992; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Willms, 1999a; Wolfe & Mash, 2006). However, students with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties tend to have lower rates of academic success and school completion (Wagner et al., 2003; Kauffman, 2008; Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). Shedding light on how these students perceive their learning environments can help to facilitate the development of effective prevention and intervention programs that seek to promote success for all learners.

This research study aims to explore students' perspectives on their learning environments at school, through the use of participatory action research (PAR). In collaboration with the teachers and parents, a photography project took place at an elementary school in the Montreal area in Canada. Seven elementary students from grade one to grade six, who had been identified as having socio-emotional difficulties participated and took photographs of what was most important to them about learning at school. Students were interviewed about their photographs and were then invited to share their stories and photographs with their teachers, parents, and peers through a final closing photo exhibition. Teacher focus groups were also conducted in order to understand how these students' environments may play a role in their learning.

Using grounded theory to guide this qualitative analysis of the students' visual storytelling narratives, we explored emerging themes and patterns from these narratives to understand student perceptions. Interestingly, consistent with other research pointing to the importance of family-school collaboration, students' perspectives of their school environment seems to always be coupled with how it relates to their home lives. Secondly, although this study discussed learning and engagement, student narratives seem to focus more on social relationships as highly influential in their school life; the students did not seem to include much on academic engagement. Finally case study summaries using focus group discussions and field notes reveal the strengths and challenges that each child was perceived to have, as well as how each child engaged with the methodology of using photography as a tool to express various needs and wants.

Overall it seems that the findings may suggest that these students put other forms of learning and engagement at the forefront of their school experience. With this understanding, a

supportive environment can be created for these students and adapted to their perceptions of engagement in school. Final discussions include reflections on the methodology as a school engagement activity.

## Acknowledgements

I have to say, I began this program a little lost. Thankfully a professor gave me some advice, and told me to go in search of a project I can dedicate myself too. From there I discovered participatory action research, a form of research that I had not been exposed to before, a style that I immediately fell in love with. So thank you to that professor, for talking some sense into me. I needed that.

I cannot begin to express how incredibly valuable the time I have spent working on this project has been. It is through our relationships that we learn what we will carry forward in our lives. I have had the privilege of working with so many wonderful people who have all guided me to a deeper understanding of how to conduct research in a practical and meaningful manner. First and foremost, I have to appreciate the kids I worked with. Each one included me in their realities, and I will forever be marked by the wonderful moments shared and the process we constructed together.

The level of support I received at the school throughout this experience was tremendous. The T-team and school staff provided me with an abundance of perspective to reflect upon and a breeding ground for new ideas and communication strategies. I was always reminded of the important and exhilarating role I was in as a learner, a learner who had purpose in the team. One member in particular took me under their wing, guided me, and gave this project the necessary safe space to really take shape. To you, I am grateful.

To Harriet, there is nothing I can say that will ever properly convey the amount of appreciation I have for you and the time you have so graciously given me. Far beyond just this project, I feel as though I have received the most deeply enriching mentorship for both my professional and personal development. Please never stop being you.

Finally, in commemoration of the I-Click project, I leave you with photographs representing the photo exhibition and a part of my learning experience.



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## I-Click Photography: An Exploration of Student Perspectives on Learning and Engagement

With a predominant medical model influencing the methods used in the evaluation of academic success interventions for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, there has been a focus on attempting to find the recipe for success. These studies have concentrated on using self-reports and/or behavioural observations from teachers, parents, school staff, and researchers alike and have brought many significant variables to light. It has led to the recognition of school engagement as being a crucial element influencing school completion and success (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Baker, Derrer, Davis, Dinklage-Travis, & Linder, 2001; Boyle & Lipman, 2002; Covell, 2009; Gamoran, 1992; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Willms, 1999a; Wolfe & Mash, 2006). However, few studies have utilized the child's perspectives to unveil information about how to best support academic success. By using Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods, there is now a shift towards a more social-constructionist perspective focused on exploring the strengths and limitations of the community through the child's perspective (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). This new perspective may hold potential for improving student participation.

Participatory action research (PAR) has become an increasingly used method of research for vulnerable populations and communities (Drew, Duncan, & Sawyer, 2010; Hergenrather, Rhodes, & Bardhoshi, 2009; Messiou, 2012; Wang & Burris, 1997). It breaks down barriers between researchers and participants resulting in a cooperative co-researching dynamic between both groups (Clark, 2010; Kellett, 2010; Messiou, 2012). Using this method to explore what previous research has found to be a crucial element of academic success in children may help shed light on the child's perspective of school and learning. As the Quebec Education Plan is now focused on the inclusion of students with difficulties in the regular classroom, this proves challenging for teachers, parents, and school staff (Ministère de l'Éducation, 1999). Shedding light on how these children understand their school environment and learning can help facilitate the development of effective prevention and intervention programs that seek to promote success for all learners.

The following will explore school engagement in relation to children experiencing emotional and/or behavioural difficulties and how Participatory Action Research (PAR) methods can provide a platform to allow these children to communicate their thoughts on school and learning.

## Review of the Literature

## **Defining Emotional and Behavioural Disorders**

Being able to define and characterize the emotional and/or behavioural disorder (EBD) categorization may hold importance for the understanding of how to meet the needs of these childhood concerns. It is therefore challenging that there does not yet seem to be a consensus on how exactly to define EBD, let alone understand how to best approach EBD interventions. According to the fourth edition of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-IV-R), EBD is a clinical childhood diagnosis consisting of emotional and/or behavioural symptomatology that is significantly and persistently disruptive to the child's daily school and overall functioning. Symptoms can include difficulty learning that cannot be attributed to intellectual, sensory or health factors, having difficulty with building and/or maintaining peer and adult relationships, inappropriate behaviour and/or feelings given the circumstances, a general pervasive unhappy or depressed mood, and finally a tendency to externalize personal and/or school issues through the development of physical symptoms (DSM; American Psychiatric Association, 2000 [APA] as cited in Cullinan, 2004). Alternate definitions, such as that of National Mental Health and Special Education Coalition, characterize EBD as a disability that comprises of behavioural or emotional responses in school that violate appropriate age, cultural, or ethnic norms resulting in negative consequences for their educational performance (Forness & Knitzer, 1992). Often, these inappropriate responses are not influenced by school intervention, and take place in two or more settings, one of which is school-related (Cullinan, 2004; Forness & Knitzer, 1992). Therefore, the school setting is a natural setting that may facilitate observations and alternative ways to understand children's behavioural difficulties.

The diagnostic criteria may seem to provide the necessary details to identify which children are in need of services, however in Canada, where each province is responsible for their own educational practices, there does not seem to be a federal consensus on who falls under this EBD category (Dworet & Maich, 2007). In addition, emotional-behavioural problems can be related to children's social, familial, and economic circumstances (Dworet & Maich, 2007). Therefore, each province has adopted a functional definition that is used to assess and plan for their individual needs (Dworet & Maich, 2007). For example, provinces such as New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have little to no labelling practices, using an inclusive school model to provide for the needs of each child, whereas Newfoundland and Labrador take a rigorous assessments approach to try and provide services to those who are in need (Dworet & Maich, 2007). With the Quebec Education Program aiming to instruct, qualify, and socialize all students and the Special Needs Education policies in place for students experiencing difficulties, there seems to be support for more of an inclusion philosophy (Ministere de l'Education, 1999).

Students are not usually given a specific psychiatric label unless necessary. Alternatively, they are classified as at-risk students, kept in regular or special classrooms, and are provided school support services when possible (Ministère de l'Éducation, 1999). This does not mean that all schools follow this model in a similar fashion however (Dworet & Maich, 2007).

These variations in operational definitions within provinces and between school boards may reflect the fact that children's needs within this category vary depending on their social, cultural, and familial circumstances. It may be necessary to consider these unique needs and allow for a flexible delivery of appropriate services.

### **School Engagement**

In Quebec, school engagement is revered as a school resiliency characteristic (Covell, 2009) and is something that has been discussed and explored at length in educational research and policy, especially in relation to students experiencing difficulties or deemed at-risk (e.g. Al-Hendawi, 2012; Baker, Derrer, Davis, Dinklage-Travis, & Linder, 2001; Boyle & Lipman, 2002; Covell, 2009; Gamoran, 1992; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Willms, 1999; Wolfe & Mash, 2006). There are three main components: behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Behavioural engagement includes behaviours that exemplify participation, effort, and persistence, such as attendance and involvement in class activities and tasks (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). These are overt behaviours that can generally be seen by simple observation (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Cognitive engagement revolves around the perceptions and beliefs students hold about themselves in relation to school (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Such beliefs include their perceptions of how effective and competent they are in school, how effective they are at self-regulated learning, as well as their motivations, aspirations, and goals (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). The value judgment they hold on learning is also part of the cognitive engagement component (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Finally, student feelings about their school, teachers, and peers, as well as their general affect and interests are part of the emotional engagement component (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). Simons-Morton and Chen (2009) found that although having friends did not directly influence school enjoyment or academic performance, a lack of friends and peer support negatively impacted student adjustment to school.

### **EBD and the Importance of School Engagement**

School engagement is also found to improve students' wellbeing (Pierce et al., 2004), correlate with school completion, academic achievement, and lead to greater future economic outcomes (Kauffman, 2008; Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008; Wagner et al., 2003; Willms, 2003).

In turn, this school success is correlated with reduced rates of future violence and societal conduct violations for children found to be at risk for these negative long-term outcomes (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, Hawkin, 2004; Covell, 2009).

Despite the importance of school engagement for students' success, not all students are able to engage in school and feel a sense of school belonging. Students with emotional/behavioural concerns may not foresee the importance of school success and therefore may tend to have difficulties adapting to school life, both academically and socially (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Boyle & Lipman, 2002; Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Willms, 1999; 2003; Wolfe & Mash, 2006). They may have difficulties engaging in school tasks and may alienate themselves from sources of social belonging and support, such as peers and teachers (Gouvernement de Québec, MELS, 2007; Tsai & Cheney, 2012). This may also lead to externalizing behaviours such as aggression, opposition, persistent refusal to engage in the school tasks, or internalizing behaviours such as withdrawal, anxiety, fear, isolation, and lack of concentration (Gouvernement de Québec, MELS, 2007). These behaviours reduce their level of school engagement and negatively impact their learning (Gouvernement de Québec, MELS, 2007; Hirschfield & Gasper, 2011). In elementary, students with emotional and behavioural difficulties are found to be up to 2 grade levels behind academically (Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). In high school, this increases to falling up to 3.5 grade levels behind (Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). Furthermore, Wagner et al. (2003) have found a significant difference in suspension/expulsion rates between students with behavioural/emotional concerns (72.9%) and students with all other disabilities (32.7%), as well as with typically developing students (22%).

Staying in school can create opportunity for the formation of partnerships between school, family, and community, and providing the necessary ongoing support these students need (Baker, 1998). However, due to high drop out rates, not all students are capitalizing on the support offered in school. Unfortunately, research focused on adolescent disengagement has found a 50% drop out rate and the lowest graduation rate of any disability (Kauffman, 2008; Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). These students are not even attaining the most basic definition of school success: school completion. The lack of academic and behavioural coping skills are creating difficulties attaining and maintaining a job in the competitive market, leading to a 52% employment rate after high school (Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008). Furthermore, longitudinal studies reveal that half of these students continue to suffer from psychological and social issues well into adulthood (Gutkin, 2012; Offord and Bennett, 1994). These detrimental long-term economic and health consequences bring up strong reasons for school engagement to be

considered alongside other school factors such as academic achievement. In addition, school engagement is a malleable characteristic. It stems from attitudes and behaviours and can be influenced by surrounding agents and environments such as teachers, parents, school policy, and practice (Gamoran, 1992; Willms, 1999; 2003). Interventions need to target school engagement as a critical aspect of school success with elementary students with EBD concerns who are already at risk for disengagement and its long-term negative outcomes.

Interestingly, interventions with an ecological perspective focusing on engagement and learning tend to have the greatest chances of long-term success (Trickett & Rowe, 2012; Baker, Derringer, Davis, Dinklage-Travis, & Linder, 2001). In line with Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, creating partnerships with those who have direct influence on the child can greatly benefit the potential to positively impact students' engagement in school and learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Doll, Spies, and Champion (2012) have found that interventions attempting to reduce drop-out rates focus on school completion with more recent attempts to encourage active participation in learning. These varying definitions of school success influence and change the emphasis on school engagement. When the goal is to ensure students do not drop out, attention is placed on the prevention of negative behaviours associated with drop-out rates such as absences, uncompleted work, and misbehaving (Doll, Spies, & Champion, 2012). However, there seems to be a lack of emphasis on building up appropriate positive behaviours as replacements for their negative counterparts (Doll et al., 2012). These positive behaviours can aid in gaining peer acceptance, as well as help increase positive perceptions of competence in academic, social, and emotional realms (Doll et al., 2012; Larouche et al., 2008). Therefore, attaining school success as defined by the completion of school and the acquisition of the necessary skills to enter the workforce, necessitates an ecological approach focused on changeable factors both within the school and in the home (Doll et al., 2012). This is important as children with emotional/behavioural concerns are often those also found living in difficult circumstances such as family conflict, instability, and lack of engagement in the community (Fox, Dunlap, & Povell, 2002; Wolfe & Mash, 2006). These home environments must be taken into consideration as they can impact students' engagement and sense of belonging. Creating family-school partnerships can open the door to encouraging home engagement and participation in the learning process (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hill & Taylor, 2010). Parental involvement was in fact found to positively influence school engagement and success when that involvement was within an authoritative parenting style (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). It seems the authoritative parenting style has a positive influence on school adjustment and a

negative effect on the development of problem-behaving friends (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009).

Programs that take advantage of the home, school, and community to reinforce positive behaviours and encourage self-competence and long-term goals can lead to brighter adult outcomes. Adding active participation in learning to the definition of school success requires focus on student behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs. Student goals are supported by various ecological tiers and are kept relevant and realistic by emphasizing the importance of understanding student attitudes, values, and emotional experiences in relation to school learning. By tapping into these various areas of the child's surrounding environments, one is able to fulfill various components of engagement.

As previously stated, the influence surrounding environments have on the child is a crucial factor to consider. It is one that is often overlooked due to the dominance of the medical model in our mental health society (Gutkin, 2012; Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). In order to fully understand behaviour, one must understand the individual as well as their environment. In other words, behaviour becomes a function of the interaction between the person and the environment ( $B=f(P \times E)$ ) (Lewin formula: Williams & Greenleaf, 2012)). Taking into account Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979), it is argued that the importance for social, emotional, and academic success lies in the interaction between the children's surrounding ecological systems (i.e., home, school, neighbourhood, and community).

However, previous studies have relied on teacher, parent, and other adult accounts to develop an understanding of the child's observable behaviours and beliefs surrounding school engagement and learning (e.g. Al-Hendawi, 2012; Baker, Derrer, Davis, Dinklage-Travis, & Linder, 2001; Boyle & Lipman, 2002; Covell, 2009; Gamoran, 1992; Kauffman, 2008; Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008; Wagner et al., 2003; Willms, 1999a; Wolfe & Mash, 2006). Few studies have actually explored the child's perspective on this issue. Those who have, such as Covell (2009) and Simons-Morton and Chen (2009), have used self-report measures that may not necessarily be easily used with younger elementary school students. Furthermore, students may not feel comfortable and fully engaged in answering a self-report measure, which may then impact the amount of time and effort put into responding.

Interestingly, Al-Hendawi (2012) conducted a meta-analysis and found that the engagement measures being used for children with EBD were not sensitive enough to properly capture the various components of engagement. Results suggested that measures of school engagement were too heavily focused on behavioural components (Al-Hendawi, 2012). Furthermore, Al-Hendawi (2012) alluded to the fact that behavioural measures may in actuality



be more sensitive to class management techniques than actual cognitive and emotional engagement. It seems compliance may be mistaken for engagement. This misconception of engagement may also lead to a greater focus on students displaying externalizing behaviours of EBD and may be missing those presenting with more internalizing, emotional EBD concerns (Al-Hendawi, 2012). Behaviours falling into the EBD categorization have traditionally been separated into externalizing and internalizing behaviours (Kauffman, Brigham, & Mock, 2004). Externalizing behaviours such as tantrums and noncompliance, generally fall into conduct related problems, whereas internalizing behaviours, such as depression and anxiety, are emotional and mood related problems (Kauffman et al., 2004; Macklem, 2008). Due to the disruptive nature of externalizing behaviours, students exhibiting these issues are more likely to be identified at school as needing extra support services (Hunter-Carsch, Tiknaz, Cooper, & Sage, 2006). However, this may not reflect the actual prevalence difference between externalizing and internalizing symptoms. Those exhibiting more internalizing, emotional issues tend to be seen as behaving appropriately within the classroom or school environment and so, may not be as easily identified (Hunter-Carsch, et al., 2006). Furthermore, several researchers (i.e., Kauffman et al., 2004; Macklem, 2008; Marmorstein, 2007) hold evidence for externalizing and internalizing comorbidities, where students displaying disruptive behaviours associated with ADHD, conduct, and oppositional/defiant concerns are also harbouring emotional concerns such as depression and anxiety. Therefore, children exhibiting external behaviours may very well also have internalizing issues that go unnoticed.

Although student behaviours were observed directly in order to avoid teacher bias, it seems that measures such as time sampling are more concerned with the quantity of engagement and less on the quality (Al-Hendawi, 2012). Once again, the emotional and cognitive components of engagement are not captured using these methodological tools. As well, it seems that studies focus on classroom behaviours and engagement (Al-Hendawi, 2012). Student engagement including a sense of belonging with their school and peers are also not necessarily examined in this study of academic engagement.

As with Bandura's research on self-efficacy (i.e., a judgment made on one's own ability to act successfully on their environments), Phillips (1984) found that students who perceive themselves to be less competent than others, regardless of actual competency, have lower academic standards for themselves, expect to achieve less than their peers, and attribute their successes mostly to luck and parental assistance. It also influences which activities they are engaged in, the level of difficulty of these activities, the level of investment and effort put into

these activities, their anxiety levels, and their persistence when achievement is confronted with obstacles (Bouffard, Boisvert, & Vezeau, 2003; Fleury-Roy & Bouffard, 2006; Phillips, 1984).

Perceptions of social acceptance are also negatively influenced. Despite acceptance by their peers, these children still tend to feel a sense of peer rejection (Larouche, Galand, & Bouffard, 2008). This low perceived competence from the students also correlated with how teachers perceived them (Fleury-Roy & Bouffard, 2006; Phillips, 1984). Fleury-Roy and Bouffard (2006) found that teachers had lower expectations for success from these students. Furthermore, cognitive, behavioural and emotional engagement declines as students' lose interest in school, participate less, become socially isolated, and run the risk of dropping out of school (Fleury-Roy & Bouffard, 2006). However, Fleury-Roy and Bouffard (2006) found that teachers were not able to accurately classify students based on their self-perceived competence levels, calling into question the reliance of adult reporting of student engagement levels. Interestingly, Covell (2009) measured school engagement in elementary students attending schools focused on giving students autonomy by teaching and respecting their rights and interests. Results suggest that those students who are given a chance to "build an intrinsic sense of value and self-esteem" are more engaged and have a greater chance of success (Covell, 2009, p.41).

As the above studies exemplify, students' perceptions of their abilities to successfully interact within their environments impact their level of school engagement. Covell (2009) would agree that understanding how students are experiencing their school is an important first step to intervention planning for students with low school engagement. We need to understand what is important to them.

### **Action Research**

As the above has exemplified, ecological systems interact with and influence school engagement. Family-school collaborations enable more information to be shared and understood as well as provide better support for the student. However, previous studies exploring school engagement for students at-risk for emotional and behavioural difficulties have not necessarily been able to capture the different components of school engagement, nor have they explored the student perspective. As Fleury-Roy and Bouffard (2006) and Phillips (1984) have shown, student perceptions can impact school success.

In order to explore student and community perspectives on school engagement at the elementary school level, through an ecological model, a visual storytelling media method is used. This form of action research has its roots in feminist theory, Freire's critical consciousness theory, and documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1997). Basically, the tie this method has

to feminist theory comes from the attention that is drawn onto the fact that the researcher is an outsider attempting to understand a particular issue within the community (Wang & Burris, 1997). It is therefore important to hold the community as an active player within the research. They have a knowledge base that the outside researcher does not. Working in partnership allows for a greater understanding of the issue at hand. In addition, Freire's theory of critical consciousness adds a level of self-reflection and critical thought (Wang & Burris, 1997). As ideas and themes emerge, discussion with the community can aid in the exploration of these ideas. Finally, documentary photography uses images as a form of communication, breaking any language barriers that may exist (Wang & Burris, 1997). This also includes the communication barriers between adults and children. Clark (2010) brings to light the fact that adults are researching children's understanding with measures that are geared towards adult communication. Children must therefore cross the barrier between child and adult communication which may result in children not being able to share their perspectives in a way that adults can understand (Kellett, 2010). Einarsdottir, Dockett, and Perry (2009) have demonstrated how using drawings as a focus in child research can actually improve rapport and allow the child to feel more comfortable to share their thoughts and ideas. Different means of communication may need to be explored to be able to allow children to communicate their thoughts more openly.

Altogether, working in partnership with the community to represent the strengths and challenges relevant to their circumstance can be an empowering experience. This partnership changes the traditional power dynamics between the researcher and the participants (Kellett, 2010; Messiou, 2012). Children now hold more of the decision-making power in terms of what is deemed significant to communicate about their learning. The adult researchers must now remain open to different possibilities and areas of learning brought up by, and co-explored with, participants. As Kellett (2010) reports, typically, the research parameters are defined leading to an illusion of power, where participants end up contributing information on predefined research expectations.

This method has previously been used to raise awareness on issues from particular populations or communities (Drew, Duncan, & Sawyer, 2010; Hergenrather, Rhodes, & Bardhoshi, 2009; Messiou, 2012; Wang & Burris, 1997). Photography, as utilized in various photovoice studies, is used to capture their realities in a medium that is easily shared to raise awareness on the challenges and strengths of the community (Palibroda, Krieg, Murdock, & Havelock, 2009; Wang & Burris, 1997). The photographs are seen as representative of perspectives being communicated (Palibroda, Krieg, Murdock, & Havelock, 2009). Photo

elicitation studies use the photographs taken to elicit a description or discussion about the subject of the photograph (Pyle, 2012). The current study will combine both methods by adding in-depth interviews about the photographs taken to create a narrative that drives attention to the perspectives of the community, what is important, and why (Drew, Duncan, & Sawyer, 2010). Altogether, this project's goal is to provide a platform for students to explore their strengths and challenges and present their stories in a way that catches the attention of their community and bridges the gaps in understanding between children and adults.

## **Present Study**

### **Goals of the Present Study**

The aim of this study is to investigate children's perceptions of their lives as learners in the school and their teachers' perceptions of these students. This study uses Participatory Action Research (PAR) to actively involve students with emotional and behaviour difficulties as well as their families, in the research process. The study will provide students with an opportunity to identify strengths and challenges that are important to them in their daily lives. It is anticipated that the uniqueness of this community-based approach will provide teachers and school staff with expertise on how to work with these students while also providing students a chance to tell their own stories.

The two research questions for this participatory project are:

- 1) How do students with emotional and behavioural difficulties perceive their learning environment at school?
  - a. What aspects of school are perceived as important?
  - b. What do they like/don't like?
  - c. Where do they feel safe/not safe?
- 2) How are these students perceived as learners within the school?

The five main objectives of this participatory action research project are:

- 1) To empower students to tell their stories by giving them an opportunity for self-expression that may promote the development of their self-esteem and self-reflection;
- 2) To describe students' perceptions of themselves socially, emotionally and academically and their participation and engagement in learning and school functioning;
- 3) To promote discussions with teachers and parents about their perceived ability to engage these students in learning;
- 4) To capture the quality and the development of the relationships between students, school personnel and families;

- 5) To identify successful conditions that favour the development of a positive school and community climate for students with emotional and behaviour difficulties.

These objectives are anticipated to benefit the community by providing participating students with an engaging opportunity for self-reflection, acknowledgement of their inter-and-intra-personal strengths and difficulties, potentially impacting their view of the school environment and their participation as engaged learners with teachers, peers, and parents. Teachers are anticipated to benefit through an increase in understanding of the students, their families, and their views of themselves. In all, this project is thought to create an empowering experience for those participating.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The current study uses participatory action research methodology to involve the community in the research process and create opportunities for students and teachers to express their thoughts on school engagement. There will, however, be a focus on student perspectives. Parents, teachers, and students consented to participate in order for students to be guided and supported in a project that involved generating photographs that capture their beliefs, needs, and strengths in school and in their community. This process took place over a 10- week period in the spring (end of February to end of May). Their teachers and parents were also involved in a series of participatory activities over the 2012-2013 school year. The home portion of this project is part of the larger scope of the research study and therefore is described in the methodology but not included as an element of the present study.

In line with participatory community-based principles, a platform had been created for an active collaboration with the intervention team (referred to as the T-team) so as to allow the current study to complement the already existing goals of the community.

**T-team Collaboration.** The T-team is part of the Family and School Support and Treatment Team (FSSTT), a multidisciplinary, problem-solving team that consists of school personnel (e.g., teachers, behaviour technician, principal), school board personnel (e.g., psychologist, team coordinator) and other professionals (e.g., child psychiatrist) who work together to support children with EBD in the regular classroom using a consultation-based approach. The primary focus of this approach is to change the learning environment by altering teachers' and parents' perceptions of the child in difficulty and addressing conditions in the environment that may be causing or maintaining challenging behaviours. This goal is achieved

through working with the school and family to increase the understanding of the child, build realistic expectations for improvement, empower teachers and families by sharing expertise, and directly challenge the belief for the necessity of segregation for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This collaborative partnership occurs at several different levels with the explicit goals of creating a plan for student success. Initially, regular and resource teachers collaborate with the behaviour technician in the school to alter elements within the classroom environment to enhance the child's socio-emotional well-being and academic performance. In addition, the teachers and behaviour technician work toward establishing an effective parent-school relationship. As needed, the collaboration then extends to other team members (e.g., psychologist, behaviour consultant, child psychiatrist) as well as to any other relevant outside agencies (e.g., CLSC) with the continued goals of changing the school environment and working productively with parents.

The T-team project builds upon the existing infrastructure of the FSSTT by providing additional and more intensive services to children with EBD, their teachers, and their families. First, the school resource team meets and discusses children with behaviour concerns selected for T-team intervention and the extended FSST Team and the parents provide additional input. Individual goals are set for each student, and interventions are tailored to the particular need of the child and their family.

More specifically, three types of direct interventions are delivered:

- a) Academic support is provided by a resource teacher in the school with the goal of enhancing the academic skills of the students participating in the project;
- b) Therapeutic support to students is provided by an art therapist who is seeking to address the emotional and behavioural difficulties experienced by the students;
- c) Family support is provided by a nonteaching professional (e.g., family consultant) who is in regular contact with the parents of the children in the project to address school concerns and parenting issues, thereby increasing home and school collaboration.

Interventions provided through the T-team project are delivered in the student's community school. Direct academic and therapeutic support takes place in the regular classroom, but on occasion, one-on-one and small group formats may also be used. Services that are provided to families may originate within the school, but home visits by school personnel (e.g., family consultant, technician) also occur. Meetings and consultations take place regularly at the school with all partners (e.g., teachers, resource teachers, professionals involved in the project) to discuss the students' progress and continue the problem-solving process as new issues arise. Classroom teachers are a critical part of the team as the meetings are intended to help develop

and refine additional strategies for working with these students in their classrooms. In this way, the T-team project plays a critical role in helping community schools work towards adapting to the needs of all of its students.

As action research follows a community partnership model involving a working collaboration between the researchers and the community, the researcher volunteered one full day a week in the elementary school in order to begin building relationships with the students, teachers, and school staff. Volunteering began in October and consisted of providing assistance during the breakfast program, during drama class, and to the behavioural technician of the school. The added opportunity to attend the T-team weekly lunch meetings provided insight into the lives of students with behavioural and emotional issues. It also provided an opportunity to build relationships with the members of the T-team and learn about their goals. Therefore, although this project was not part of the T-team interventions, we were able to respect the goals already set in place within the school community. In January, two T-team meetings were dedicated to the discussion of this participatory action research project in order to discuss organization, feasibility, themes, and students who may benefit from participation in this project (see Appendix A for meeting agenda). The researchers continued to attend the weekly T-team meetings as a form of support and communication throughout the project.

### **Recruitment and Ethics**

This study has recruited school-aged children from an elementary school receiving FSSTT services in a suburb of Montreal. In collaboration with the T-team, seven students (ranging from grade 1 to grade 6), with emotional and behavioural difficulties and their families, have been chosen to participate in this action research project.

This study has worked in collaboration with the T-team in order to identify the children who would benefit from participating in this study. Once identified, the T-team members who have a relationship with the family called the parents over the phone to briefly explain the project and invite them to an information session (see Appendix B for information session material, including the parent consent form and parent letter). As most of the children attend the school daycare, holding an information session during these normal pick up times was most convenient for parents. This meeting was set up in order to further explain the study and allow the researcher to connect with the families. Members present at the meeting included the families, a T-team member, and the researcher. The meeting was no longer than 30 minutes and covered the information included in the consent form, as well as answered any questions the families may have had about participating in the study. Parents who wished to participate signed their consent form at this meeting. One parent was undecided so they were invited to

take a consent form home and bring it back with their decision within a week's time. Consent forms were for their participation in the home portion and for their child's participation in the school and home portion of the study. Child assent was collected at the beginning of the weekly photography sessions. Teacher consent for focus group participation was also collected (see Appendix C for the teacher consent form). Ethics approval has been obtained from Concordia University by Dr. Petrakos, as well as from the school board. The school principal and the T-team had also approved this study to take place in the 2012-2013 school year.

### **Procedure**

The current project is part of a larger study performed to evaluate the intensification of services provided by the T-team to students with emotional/behavioural concerns. The following will outline the three basic parts of the overall study: The teacher focus groups, the school photography club, and the home photography club. The current project focused on the teacher focus groups and the school photography club. The home portion, although described as part of the larger research study, is beyond the scope of the present project.

**Teacher Focus Groups.** Two rounds of focus groups took place with teachers and school staff (one before the photography project began, and one after it ended) to capture their perceptions of these students as learners, and to discuss emerging themes about family-school collaboration, the goals of the school interventions and the impact of the services on students, parents, and teachers (see Appendix D for focus group scripts). In the current study, these focus groups acted as a source of information for the context of the school, for how students with EBD are perceived as learners, and for feedback on the methodology implemented (i.e. an understanding of the perceptions that follow a project whose goal is to allow student voices to be heard).

Three focus groups were held prior to the beginning of the study. The first one comprised of the selected children's classroom teachers, the second group was made up of the resource team, gym, and drama teachers (for the purpose of clarity in this study's report, this group is referred to as the specialists), and the last focus group held comprised of the T-team and school staff. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour and was scheduled during the school's lunch hour. Lunch was provided for all participating members.

Once the project was completed, a second round of focus group meetings were scheduled to take place, once again during the school lunch hour. This time the classroom teachers were not able to attend and so there were only two groups held; one group comprised of the resource team, gym and drama teachers (i.e. the specialists), and the other of the T-team



and school staff. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour and lunch was served for each group.

During all focus groups both prior to and after the project, the graduate researcher moderated the discussion while the graduate research assistant took notes. During the final focus group with the T-team and school staff, the graduate research assistant was not available and so the graduate researcher was the only research member present. All focus groups were audio recorded.

**School Photography Club.** Students met for photography club sessions three times a week for the first six weeks, and twice a week for the remaining four weeks.

**Logistical Breakdown.** During the photo weeks (i.e. the first six weeks), the first weekly meeting consisted of a 15-minute group session followed by a 30-minute individual sessions with each student. During group meetings, students were introduced to a broad picture taking theme for that week (referred to as the “idea of the week”) and were given time to start brainstorming and taking pictures. Each student then had individual sessions with one of the researchers in order to take pictures around their school. The second meeting consisted of 15-minute individual sessions with each student during the school lunch hour. This was to ensure that students had the chance to take photographs of their peers, teachers, etc. if they so wished. At the end of the week, students met with the researcher for an individual interview about the photographs taken. In order to ensure enough time with each student, participating students were split into two groups. Group 1 had their first meeting on Mondays after school, their second meeting on Wednesdays at lunch, and their third meeting on Thursdays after school. Group 2 had their first meeting on Wednesdays after school, their second meeting on Thursdays at lunch, and their third meeting on Thursdays after school. We also made sure to have two people to conduct the photography sessions and interviews, myself (the researcher) and a research assistant. The research assistant is a Concordia University Master’s graduate who has had experience in this elementary school during her thesis data collection in 2007-2008. For this project, she was trained and then volunteered her time a week prior to data collection to introduce herself to the team, school, and students (see Appendix G for the methods mini manual used for basic training). Furthermore, in order to provide the opportunity for students to get to know and feel comfortable with the research assistant and continue to build rapport with the researcher, time was spent volunteering in the school for the entirety of the day all three days we were at the school. Although always both present during the group sessions, both myself and the research assistant put effort into establishing rapport with the children we were working with for the project by paring ourselves off with the same children

every week for the individual sessions. There was one instance where the children wanted to switch and work with the other researcher. This was respected and was always available as an option.

This format was followed for the first six weeks of the project. At the end of each of these photo weeks, students reviewed their photographs with the researcher in an individual interview. Due to time constraints, students were asked to choose their five most important pictures. They were also able to choose one photograph to take home with them and share with their families if they wanted. The researcher conducted an open ended interview, asking each student, “What is this a picture of?”; “Why did you take this picture?”; “Why is this picture important to you?”; “Who would you like to show this picture to?”; “What would you like them to know about this picture?” Follow up questions focused on clarification and elaboration of student responses (see Appendix E for photo-interview scripts). Due to time restrictions and parent pick-up schedules from daycare, interviews were no longer than 30 minutes.

The last four weeks were dedicated to putting together the photographs they would like to present to their selected audience (i.e., teachers and/or parents and/or peers). During what we called the scrapbooking weeks, the first meeting consisted of individual sessions with each student, lasting approximately 30 minutes each. This session focused on the selection of photos they would like to include in their portfolio. The second meeting continued this process with 15-minute individual sessions, and ended with a group session to work on the compilation of photos into a scrapbook. A summary of the photography club weekly format can be seen in Table 1.

*Photo Weeks Breakdown.* The first week of photography sessions focused on an introduction to photography (see Appendix F for the introduction photo session script). During the first meeting, students learned how to operate the camera as well as the ethical considerations around taking pictures. Students also began to think about the audience they would be taking pictures for (who they might like to share these pictures with). A discussion on potential picture taking ideas was held and students were given the opportunity to choose the practice idea for the week. Students paired up with the researchers and had a chance to take pictures for that week’s idea. The second meeting was an individual session between the student and the researcher to continue taking pictures during school time. The final meeting was also an individual meeting and consisted of a short interview on the photographs the student had taken. This introductory week was to help students gain familiarity with the camera and the steps each week will include.

Each of the following five weeks were centered on a theme of school engagement such as, “What is really important to you in your life”; “Who are you, really”; “Things that involve learning for you at school”; “Things that really bug you”; “Places you feel safe at school”; “Places you don’t feel safe at school”. These themes were taken from previous participatory photography research. However, in order to keep collaboration with the community a central aspect of this project, themes were discussed with the T-team in a meeting. From this discussion, five definitive themes were chosen for the photography sessions: “What is really important to you in your life”; “Things that involve learning for you at school”; “Things that really bug you”; “Places you feel safe at school”; “Places you don’t feel safe at school.”

*Scrapbooking Weeks Breakdown:* The last four weeks of the photography club were focused on the students selecting the visual representations of their lives that they would like to share with school staff, their parents, and with a group of peers. A total of approximately 25 photographs were selected. Students were able to choose any photograph they had taken, whether from school or home, in the five previous weeks. Students were also able to choose the format they wanted to present their photographs in. Along with the researchers’ support, students prepared either a tangible or digital scrapbook of their selected photographs along with a short description of what those photograph represent to them.

Table 1

*Photography Club Weekly Format*

	Monday	Wednesday	Thursday
Picture Taking Weeks	Group 1	Group 1	Group 2
	15min group session 30min individual picture taking	15min lunch session	15min lunch session
		Group 2	Group1 and 2
		15min group session 30min individual picture taking	30min individual photo interviews
Scrapbooking Weeks	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1 and 2
	30min individual photo book interview	30min individual photo book interview	15min individual sessions

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*Photography Exhibition.* Once complete, each student had created a portfolio of photographs to present to their selected audience. This exhibition was coordinated with teachers, specialists, the T-team, and parents to find a convenient time and location to showcase their photographs. The exhibition was divided into three sessions: one for peers, one for the adults in the school, and one for the parents. In order to continue the ownership over their project, students were given the choice to invite whoever they wanted from school and home. An invitation list was created and we helped each student spread the word about the details of the exhibition to the people they wanted present. On the actual day of the presentation, students ended up giving permission for their photographs to be viewed by anyone who wanted to see them.

Organized with the teachers, each student had a 15 minute block to show their invited peers. This took place in the behaviour technician's room and was done during class time in the morning before lunch. Next was a lunch time viewing session for all invited teachers, specialists, school staff, and the T-team members. Another session was organized at the end of the school day for those that were not able to make it during their lunch hour. Finally, a family viewing session was organized in the evening after dinner. Small refreshments were served for this session. Multiple members of each students' family came and participated in the exhibition.

**Home Photography Club.** The home portion included a two-week photography project with students and their families. Students were asked to take photographs at home during a two-week period. With the help of the T-team, the researcher visited each family a total of three times during these two weeks. The first visit lasted approximately 20 minutes and was focused on presenting the theme for that week of photographs at home. The presentation of the theme was followed by a brief brainstorming discussion with both the parents and the child. Once they have had a week with the camera, the child would bring it to school to give it to the researcher who would then develop the photographs and have them ready for next home session. The second and third visits lasted approximately one hour.

The first visit consisted of a short overview of the camera, the ethics of taking pictures, the theme of the week, and a bit about what to expect for the following meeting. Families were left with a disposable camera and told to take pictures throughout the week. Themes were once again centered on learning and engagement and included, "Things that you do that involve

learning for you in your life out of school”; “Who you are, really”. The second visit consisted of the family selecting five to ten photographs they took and participate in photo-interviews discussing what is important to them as a family (see Appendix E for photo-interview script). The interview followed the same format as the one done in school with the students. Once the interview was done, the theme for the following week was discussed, and a new camera was given to them. The third and final visit once again consisted of an interview with the families about the photographs they selected for that week’s theme. A short debrief discussion with the family concluded the meeting. This debrief included updates about the details of the photo exhibition happening at the end of the project as well as appreciation for their time and collaboration. Any questions and/or comments the families had were also discussed.

## **Data Analysis**

**Qualitative Analysis.** The purpose of the present study is best suited for the exploratory nature of qualitative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We helped guide students through the exploration of their own visual storytelling narratives in order to understand their perspectives on learning and school engagement. Qualitative analysis allowed emerging themes and patterns from these narratives to be explored (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Grounded Theory.** Grounded theory was used to investigate the present study. This method of analysis does not use data to support preconceived assumptions or hypotheses. Theories and concepts emerge from the data and offer insights into the reality of the participants’ experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As Strauss and Corbin (1998) express, this kind of qualitative analysis requires both critical and creative thought, as the researcher must rigorously explore the raw data while keeping an open mind to different possibilities for how the data can be interpreted. Data must be visited and revisited in order to continue comparisons and identify emerging categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data from the five weeks of school photography sessions has been analysed using grounded theory methods. Field notes from these photography sessions were reviewed and served as a check for researcher bias during the analyses of data.

The photo-interviews conducted with students at school were analyzed to address how students with emotional and behavioural difficulties perceive their learning experiences at school. The research questions remained open-ended and addressed the gaps in the literature on school engagement with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, as is common in qualitative analysis, changes were made to the research questions as themes became more apparent in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest, a microanalysis was used to analyze each word, sentence, and paragraph of transcript data from the current study. This allowed the researcher to pay close attention to the specifics of the data so as to try and understand participant interpretations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998) this also prevents “jumping precipitously to our own theoretical conclusions taking into account the participant interpretations...to avoid laying our own interpretations onto the data” (p. 65). Using microanalysis open and axial coding, initial categories and relationships between categories were identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Open-Coding.** Open coding was used in order to identify the properties (characteristics and definition of categories) and dimensions (range and variations of categories) of the categories found in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the data, open-ended coding was accompanied by memos. These were used to keep track of my thoughts and interpretations throughout the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This can also be used to inform further data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Furthermore, the process of conceptualization was used to group items with similar properties and label this new grouping (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This helped to manage the sheer amount of data and make way for axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Axial Coding.** In order to further specify and clarify the properties and dimensions of the categories identified in open-coding, axial coding was employed. This process helped to identify subcategories providing context and more in-depth analyses of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Moving back and forth between open and axial coding provided a detailed analysis of the properties and dimensions of the identified categories as well as the relationship between them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It broke down the data permitting concepts to emerge and theories to then form (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

**Selective coding.** As Strauss and Corbin (1998) state, “concepts are the building blocks of a theory” (p. 101). Selective coding refers to the process of merging and refining categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These refined categories come together to unveil a central category, one that reflects the emerging theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The visual storytelling data was qualitatively coded and analyzed using grounded theory methods. As this is a PAR project, the goal was to explore emerging themes that the community had identified as significant. Previous literature helped to give context and theoretical bearings on the overarching theme of school engagement, however, caution was kept so as not to base analyses on previous literature but on the participants’ interpretations of school engagement and learning.

***Deductive Coding.*** The focus group data was used as contextual data. This data helped to add understanding to the environment the children's perspectives were emerging from. When listening to the focus groups, we were looking to explore and compare descriptions of these students as learners in this school. What information or perspectives did the adults hold of these children? What are their experiences working with these children? What are their understandings of the student photographs and photography process? The focus group discussions were analysed using these guiding questions. Therefore, the focus groups conducted with teachers, the T-team, and school staff were used to address how the community perceives these students and their learning and school engagement.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in the present study was to work in partnership with the participants and their community in order to provide a platform for participants to be able to present and share their perspectives of their learning environments.

Clark (2010) speaks to the researcher adapting the role of “authentic novice” where one would claim the stance of learner with a sincere motivation to learn with, and from, community members. This creates a very fluid and collaborative platform to explore and identify what is of significance to the community members. In the current study, it was crucial to keep in mind that it was not about what the researchers wanted to know, but about what the students wanted to tell us. This shift in mentality allowed us to keep hold of this position of “authentic novice” throughout the project.

With this in mind, it is also important to mention that the role of the researcher was also shaped by the shared power dynamics between the researchers and the students. Although we had developed a research plan for this project, working with the students in this collaborative manner meant that they held decision making power in a way that, at times, changed certain details of the project. An example of this would be how certain students no longer wanted to take pictures but instead wanted to create stop-motion videos, or build lego sets and created movies. Other examples had more to do with the ‘idea of the week’ they had each week. There were times where students had other ideas in mind, ideas they wanted to explore. It was important for us to realize that the goals of the project could change throughout the process of the project and that we needed to stay flexible enough to allow changes that supported open communication and provided a safe space within the relationships built to negotiate the strategies in place for the exploration of perspectives.

The researcher's role was also to take the necessary steps to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Letts, Wilkins, Laws, Stewart, Bosch, & Westmorland, 2007).

In order to ensure that the descriptions and data are true to the participants' experience, the researcher and research assistant kept field notes, a detailed reflective journal including descriptions of the data collection process, the participants, and the setting. This enabled the researchers to be more aware of their own biases and how they interacted with the data. Furthermore, having two sets of reflective journals, provided differences in perspective that were taken into consideration when reflecting on researcher bias. Member checking was also implemented into the data collection process (Letts et al., 2007). Every week, students were asked about their photos. This session was recorded and reflected upon by the researcher. The last four weeks, students were preparing for their photo exhibition, choosing the photos they would like to share and once again, talked about what they meant. The researchers helped each student put together their photos and therefore had a chance to double check the accuracy of the interpretations of the messages they wanted to get across with their photo projects. These steps enabled the present study data to be credible (Letts et al., 2007). The reflective journals also helped with dependability, as it enabled the researcher to be confident in the connections between the data and the findings (Letts et al., 2007).

In order to further account for issues of confirmability, the researchers had weekly meetings to discuss and interpret the events of the week. These meetings were also used to help guide any decisions that needed to be made in terms of the data collection process. As this qualitative study was being done in collaboration with the students and the school team, there were weekly discussions and updates on the project in the T-team meetings. This ensured that the decisions were shared between the community and the researchers throughout the research process.

Lastly, issues of transferability were taken into consideration when keeping record of the entire data collection process (Letts et al., 2007). Detailed descriptions were kept in order to allow the findings to be clear and potentially beneficial to other students in the community.

## **Findings**

Let's begin by acknowledging the fact that the results of this project have come from an extensive collaboration between the teachers, school staff, specialists, the T-team, the seven participating children, their families and finally, the researchers. This collaboration comprised multiple perspectives and provided access to a rich body of information on how students with



emotional and behaviour difficulties view their learning environments, as well as how these same students are perceived within this environment. A qualitative analysis has been carried out with the use of 52 transcripts from the photo-elicited child interviews and picture taking sessions and five transcripts from the focus group discussions. This analysis unveiled multiple themes related to each child's experience of school.

In order to acquire a deep understanding of the emerging themes from the children's stories, it is crucial that we first introduce each child that has participated in the project. These introductions are from a close analysis of the focus group discussions and represent the perceptions of teachers, specialists, and the T-team members.

Following this, we take a look at how each child appropriated their projects and unveil any patterns found within the child's approaches to the I-Click photography tool. How photography has been used by each child will provide further context to what is communicated through this tool. These summaries are informed through my field notes, focus group discussions, and the student's photo-interviews.

Finally, we will delve into how this group of children perceive their learning environments, taking a look at themes that have emerged from their photo elicited storytelling during the 5 weeks of picture taking around the school.

### **How These Students Are Perceived within their Learning Environments**

The following describes each child in this project through the lens of their teachers, specialists, and the T-team members. Each summary is comprised of information gathered from the focus group discussion both prior to and after the photography project. Therefore each child's description varies in length depending on how much detail had been provided during these discussions. These summaries are meant to provide context, an understanding of how these seven children and their families are perceived within their learning environments. Details about the child's home and family life, about the child's academic and school life, and about different strategies implemented can be found in the summaries below.

**Child E.** Child E is in grade 1 and has an older brother attending the same school. Her parents are separated and she lives at both her mother's house and her father's house. Academically, Child E performs well, and is well spoken, being seen as "pretty smart and pretty sharp" (Teachers, Focus groups). However teachers speak to how "she would be intimidating people", how she can be a "mean girl", "something we don't see in class." Teachers report that Child E "...likes to tell people what to do so it affects them quite a bit."

Child E parents are separated and we know that "...they have a lot on their plate with her sibling, we don't know much about the situation, we just know that he's a lot to handle..."

(Teachers, Focus groups). Regardless of the struggles with her brother, teachers note that Child E's parents attend school meetings when they are invited in.

It seems as though Child E functions well in her classroom. This may possibly be a reason for not discussing any strategies or any other related details about Child E.

**Child H.** Child H is in grade 1. He is an only child and lives with his mother. His mother is involved with Child H's learning, being perceived as someone who "wants to do the best that she can" for her son (Teachers, Focus groups). His parents are separated and his stepfather has recently moved back to South Africa. When speaking of family, Child H refers to his mother, grandmother, father, stepfather, and mother's boyfriend. His teachers discuss their thoughts on his issues with affection and how it may relate to his home life:

He has a bit of trouble with affection. We always give him affection but I don't think he gets a lot of it at home - Not through hugging, maybe intellectual - Yeah like [at home] they say I love you and things like that but it's not very touchy feely.

Be that as it may, throughout the process of this project, it became increasingly clear that Child H has a very close relationship with his mother. His mother is characterized as someone who is "really, she's very bright - very complex mind." (T-team, Focus groups). The T-team also discussed about how Child H and his mother are similar in a sense, paying close attention to detail and both being very bright. His mother seems to know how to communicate with him in a way that engages him into the conversation and provides understanding, something that the principal stated she cannot always get from him:

When she came in and she made a whole analogy as to his behaviour and...those video game characters. Video games, our life line and what do you do and all of this. She went places that wow, and he was right in there with her. I was, I was tuning out and he suddenly made eye contact, he was leaning over, he was into that whole world of it whereas before it was meh, why are you talking at me. He wasn't interested and he wasn't part of anything.

At school, Child H is quite strong academically, and is being described as "very smart and very bright. He knows how to speak in French, he knows how to read and write, his math skills are good I think" (Teachers, Focus groups). He is also seen as someone with "much attention to detail" (Teachers, Focus groups).

However teachers also seem to be struggling with his disruptive behaviours in class saying "Academically he's strong, but socially...it hinders his academics." Both his classroom teachers recount the difficulties they have been having with him in class:

He's very emotional, a lot of anxiety. He doesn't express himself very well, he's very loud. Increasingly loud. He keeps screaming in class to get people's attention. Very disruptive. He's a fun, happy kid, loves to tell jokes and loves to you know express like joy but he doesn't he can't control when to do what. - Self-control is an issue, and is a goal for him

Interestingly, it seems as though the relationship he has with his mother in terms of his school and his learning, are influencing his behaviour and performance at school. His classroom teachers point to the well intentioned pressures to make friends that are coming from home:

...mom had expressed when we met with her during interview night that she tells him to make friends. He's concerned about not having friends, and she and the best way to make friends is to be class clown, be funny, be humorous so he does a lot of that. But it's also, it's coupled with the fact that he can't deal with things socially so sometimes it's a positive class clown moment and sometimes it's disastrous and he gets frustrated. So we're trying to help him channel all that negative energy into positive but it's just challenging for us as well because depending on how open he is to it at the moment so. The goal is self-control, so stop, calm down, breath, and sometimes he goes through it and sometimes...

Mention of Child H having issues with art may also be linked to the fact that his mother is an artist and that,

he has, he's a perfectionist, he wants it to look a certain way and if it doesn't he throws a fit. Some days he loves it and he has an idea in his head and he can put it to paper and other days I'm not even gonna try - and it might be something as simple as erasing and it makes like a smear sometimes, and he oh this is terrible, he'll tear it up and throw it in the garbage so yeah - he gets angry very easily, cries very easily.

However Child H's classroom teachers speak to the successful strategies they have implemented with Child H in the classroom:

He works well you know with constant positive praise. I find he responds, like if he's doing something and you look at him and you say you wanna be a four? We started him every day we gauge his behaviour one to five, he wants to go home and show his family that he has a 3 and up. So sometimes just to help him with that throughout the day makes it work... you're doing great buddy or whatever you know it turns it around for the next five minutes and then but it's just to encourage him and keep going. And he really just needs constant praise, constant reinforcement that he's a good person, a good student, a good friend.

It's interesting to note that the strategies found to be effective also seem to somehow have a link to his mother, and showing her that he did well.

**Child L.** Child L is in grade 6. His parents are divorced and he lives between his mother's and father's house. He has two biological siblings, an older sister in high school and an older brother who has a severe physical and mental disability. His sister will sometimes go and stay at their father's place, but mostly stays with their mother. His older brother lives full time with their mother and periodically stays over at their father's house for short amounts of time. Child L's father lives with his girlfriend who has two other children. There are also many pets in their home including cats, dogs, and mice. During a home visit, Child L was very keen on introducing me to all the kittens and other animals in the house.

There is quite a bit of discussion around Child L's home life, especially since he is perceived as being in crisis. Many teachers, specialists, and T-team members seem to have him on the forefront of their minds, referring to his challenging relationships at home, lack of attention, and his resistance to engage in school. As one teacher states, he seems to be the "scapegoat" (Teachers, Focus groups). She recounts her experience with him and his family:

There's been problems with the stepbrothers, his sister's now in crisis. I taught her in grade 1 and but she over the years learned how to play the game when she would go to her dad's. There's a very handicapped brother at the mom's so...at both homes he has no attention. He's concerned for his dad, his parents, he doesn't want to upset his dad and yet he just...He said that he would just like [his stepmother] to be a little nicer. So it's very frustrating.

The T-team members talk about trying to get Child L's father more involved as a form of support, something they were trying to do in the previous year.

Another teacher describes Child L as having "a bit of a mystery in him and a big concern of everybody's right now because it was thought he was in a depression." She also points to difficulties in Child L's home life, although does so with firm opinions on the situation:

...there's a lot going on in his home life. And the issue right now is how to deal with this because he's got a step mother who's just making his life miserable and anything that's going well, anytime there's anything positive it's all being sabotaged by her. She rakes him over the coals, she has told him in many ways that he's responsible for any problems in the family...now social workers and people from outside so we're concerned about him because he's now, when he was in the classroom he's not in the class a lot. He's very bright, he's just in crisis and our recommendation really is to have him removed somehow from the home. If there's going to be any kind of success because

any treatment he's getting, just like I said he goes back [home] and you know sometimes he's even worse.

At school, Child L seems to have had difficulties staying in class and engaging with the learning material. Apparently he seems to “jump in and out. It almost seems a little manipulative but we were just updated and told they thought he was maybe depressed...he has a lot of anxiety so” (Teacher, Focus groups).

With all this talk about what is not going well with Child L, it is interesting to note that teachers recognize that his struggles in school are rooted in psycho-social health. This proves to be quite complicated when coming up with strategies for his academic development:

Well in terms of French he's never really in class granted that he's struggling like with his emotions the academics really come secondary right and the fact that he's not as proficient in French as the other kids he feels that he doesn't want to be in there. Cause he knows that if I modify the work that he's going to be “different” and he doesn't want to be different but the other one is too hard so it's like there's no win-win with him. It's like I modify he won't do it, I don't modify he still won't do it. (Teachers, Focus groups)

Although much of what was mentioned revolved around the challenges Child L has both at home and at school, teachers still took the time to acknowledge Child L's interests and how they relate to his strengths and wellbeing: “But he does enjoy the art component of it. He loves art. I think that's an escape for him and he's really good at it so, very meticulous.” Another teacher speaks to his interest in Brazilian culture, saying “and he actually stayed in the French room the entire day. It was safe for him, he kept working on his mask, building it cause he many got the strips and everything, fantastic.”

Finally, there is mention of the small improvements noticed since last year, such as the ability to stay in class:

Like at least Child L last year it's a step forward now at least he's sitting in a room, he'll stay in the room, ask for a note, bring a note if he can go. And at least he's going somewhere where we know where he is and feels good enough to stay with someone in a room whereas before he was just kind of hiding. (Teacher, Focus groups)

His mother's increased involvement in his academic life is also mentioned as a noticeable improvement:

And there was some parental involvement so that was good. He told me the other day that he was upset with his mom because she was making him...she was putting a lot of pressure on him. And I mentioned well the pressure is coming from the fact that you didn't do anything for so long that now you know, when you procrastinate, you know, I'm

a master of it, you gotta work under pressure after. So he's feeling it, he's feeling it. But it's good, he's gotta feel it. (Teachers, Focus groups)

It seems the adults around him are aware of his interests and his challenges. They recognize the struggles in his home life and its influence on his school experience, while also noticing differences that come about from parental involvement.

**Child O.** Child O is in grade 6, in a small closed classroom for children who have “severe learning disabilities so [he and Child R] are very behind in French and in English. [They] are having a more difficult time grasping the school material in a regular classroom” (Teachers, Focus groups). Otherwise, his teachers describe him as being “very sweet, pretty innocent, immature, and is a, I would say follower....a good kid.” However well behaved he is in school, it seems as though the difficulties that lie at home is what calls for concern. His teachers recount the incident that clued them in to the fact that Child O may be masking more than he lets on:

I know last year there was a [self-harm] incident that around this time of the year...so there's obviously a lot more that he's masking we learned so I also would picture him as a child like that if you see him he's friendly and loving and that incident that happened at the school...so there's you know that's how we discovered that there's a lot more...

Although Child O is now living in foster care, teachers mention moments where he slowly revealed details of his past:

He blurted out, I was on a bus ride with him somewhere and he blurted out all kinds of stuff, like mother leaving him and beating, he got himself beat to protect his brothers, and she left me at the school, like he's sitting there all you know, lots of horrible things.

Aside from also recognizing that Child O is “very resilient” (Specialists, Focus groups) given his home circumstance, teachers, specialists, and the T-team did not go into much more detail about Child O. It seems as though Child O's good hearted nature and these home challenges are what is most significant in their minds when discussing Child O.

**Child R.** Child R lives with his mother, her boyfriend, and his two younger half-sisters. He is in grade 6, in the same closed classroom as Child O. He too struggles with his academic learning, particularly in French and English. Interestingly, he seems to appreciate the fact that he is in this particular class, pointing to how it is helpful for him:

...the first day when I went in, those kids were feeling in that class, they were in the bobo class, or why weren't they in the regular, so I went in and tried to smooth it around a little bit. And he put up his hand he says, oh I need to be in this class because I have dyslexia and this is going to help me - he wanted to stay. He didn't want to go. (T-team, Focus group)

Furthermore, although he has trouble with English, he seems to love to read:

And he loves to read. The other day I saw him outside of his classroom he was asking the other teacher to open up the door because he forgot the Hobbit, the book the Hobbit inside and he needed to finish it. Not for sure, for his own personal interest. (T-team, Focus groups)

Child R is new to the school, only arriving at the beginning of the school year. Teachers speak to how he has “some difficulties working with others and is very stubborn, set in his ways, likes things to go his way and if they go off course there could be some behaviour issues.”

It seems these behaviour issues revolve around his difficulties with rage. As one teacher remarks:

we were just on an overnight and you know Child R...it was the first time I honestly wasn't really afraid for myself though he could probably kill me, but I've never seen such blind rage, I've seen a lot of angry kids, I mean I can have a temper but this was like he would plough you down when he sees red which is a huge concern so.

A T-team member also comments on Child R's rage when discussing an instance during a school activity, “he shut down a couple of times, and he has that glaze, scary glazed look over his eyes where he looks right through you and you wonder what is he thinking, I don't know.”

While recounting an incident that occurred during a fieldtrip, the T-team members also mention his high level of vulnerability, immature reactions, and insecure attachment as factors causing difficulty in Child R's school life:

...I think he's testing to see if he breaks down and if he's going to act like that, are we going to be there for him? - insecurely attached - he's so insecurely attached - and how he reacts is by externalizing, so that's the shouting, the screaming, the lying down on the floor. But then the insecure attachment comes up when he comes after you if you do leave him because he doesn't want to lose you right, he can't handle that either. So I think that kind of obvious in all of your stories - and he can't see how he looks like a 2 year old - he can't see that yet - well no cause he's not in that state to see that

It is clear that Child R has had a difficult past with his previous schools, resulting in being home schooled for the last couple of months of the previous year, as well as a recommendation for the behavioural program at the Jewish General Hospital that did not seem to be properly followed up on. However, a T-team member remarks on how he seems to be improving:

He's new to our school this year and we know his history was very problematic before he got here but it's very encouraging to see despite all his difficulties before that he's doing relatively much better than he was doing in the past.

His recognized strengths seem to be his social likability, and his interest in reading. It seems that although there is this perception of Child R being this large, angry, uncontrollable child, there is also an understanding that there are elements of Child R that can be “quite insightful” (T-team, Focus groups). T-team members speak to how,

with all his behaviour I find it interesting that the kids have not judged him. They're still very patient with him - there's a likability with him. There can be a likability, yes exactly - it depends on his mood -ya that's it - during that card game they were encouraging, come on Child R, you know- ya they want to see him succeed.

However others make sure to mention that although he is liked, it may not translate to maintaining friendships, “he does have the capacity to have good friendships you know. He does have the capacity, but does he follow through or maintain them not really” (T-team, Focus groups).

**Child W.** Child W is in grade 2. She lives with her mother and brother (who is also in this project and is referred to as Child T). One of the most prominent descriptors for Child W seems to be her “stubborn streak” (Teachers, Focus groups), reflecting her desire to be in control, make decisions, and do what she wants, when she wants:

...So it's just Child W who wants to do what Child W wants to do when Child W wants to do it. And if she's told no then it's like well I'm going to do it cause I want to do it. (T-team, Focus groups)

Others comment on how Child W seems to be a sad child who does not know how to make friends: “I feel she's a sad little girl who doesn't really have friends you know I feel for her because she always seems to put herself by herself alone, you know. She doesn't really mingle very much with the kids” (T-team, Focus groups). This need to have things go her way is also seen in her interactions with peers which may be one of the reasons she may be having difficulty making friends.

When I see her in phys ed, when she does if things don't go her way then often she'll end up alone and everybody else will move on. Trying to explain to her that how you treat people is going to impact how they're going to react to you. You know, they don't have to stay there and be insulted and put down. They will choose to go play somewhere else. (T-team, Focus groups)

Her teacher also seems to share similar sentiments when describing Child W's peer relations,

“Mais elle a de la misère avec des autres enfants, c'est évident et elle n'a pas la manière d'approcher les enfants. Et puis je pense qu'elle peut être méchante de temps en temps et puis les autres sont méchants avec elle.”



Academically, she seems to be slightly behind in her work, however she is seen as a bright child who is surprisingly capable when she is able to put herself to work. Her teacher comments on the difference between how she presents herself and what she is capable of:

Mais je sais que ce qu'elle montre et ce qu'elle est capable de faire c'est deux choses différentes. She's a big theatrics. Puis des fois là elle me sorte des affaires là. Elle fait du travail, elle peut arriver là puis, Mme j'ai faite ça. Ce n'est pas facile, c'est vraiment dur, elle m'a rien demandée, elle la fait toute seule sur son pupitre, et c'est tout bon. Elle est capable. She pretends she can't.

It looks as though her emotions strongly influence the level of engagement she has with her learning:

I think that her emotions get in the way of learning, you can really see that. And I think she's really having a hard time managing that in her head so when she's kind of in a space with these emotions she doesn't know quite what to do, like what you're saying, she shuts down. And when she's in a good place she's able to be again in the moment. You know you can see her sometimes float when she's had a good day or when something good is happening you can see her be engaged. But when the emotions get in the way it's complete shutdown. (T-team, Focus groups)

The T-team comments on how her triggers are unknown, however, when they occur, it seems she shuts down and it is difficult to bring her back to the task at hand:

Child W I work with alone, one on one and she's pretty up and down, emotional. She'll come in maybe she's happy and then something will trigger and all of a sudden I've lost her I can't get any work out of her, it takes a while you gotta play and when she comes back, but I find it very difficult. You don't know what triggers it, what makes her go down. And she shut off. So that's a little bit difficult and challenging sometimes.

What's interesting is that another T-team member speaks to how Child W seems to always want to be right, otherwise she shuts down. This seems to be eluding to a potential trigger, although one that may be quite challenging to deal with:

When she has something set in her mind and if you happen to correct that, it's. There was something we were working on in French and something like le soleil est belle. I said ok well soleil is masculine so you have to say beau. I don't want to use beau. I said well this is the language...It threw her right off. I gave her some other options of words, no. I said well let's change soleil let's do belle for something else, no. That was it, I lost her. So I had to go around, do other things, get off that topic and come back to it after, so it's something like that. (T-team, Focus groups)

The idea of a coping or defense against feeling as though she is not as capable as the others around her was also mentioned by some of the teachers,

Chaque semaine, chaque lundi je fais une dictée avec les enfants première chose le matin, et chaque semaine c'est la guerre. Elle finit toujours par me dire, Ok, je n'ai pas étudiée, je ne sais pas les mots, mais je vais encore le faire. Elle garde toujours une porte de sortie, if I fail I just told my teacher I have a reason. Mais je sais qu'elle étudie, I saw her study so I know that she did, mais c'est toujours je n'ai pas étudiée, je le sais pas, je ne suis pas bonne mais je vais l'essayer - She realizes that she's not at the same level as everybody and it really bothers her, really bothers her. She doesn't want anybody to know that she's not capable.

In terms of working with Child W in class, her teacher describes it like a battle, one that requires a lot of time and compromise to come out feeling as though Child W understands who is in charge but still allows her space to engage in her work:

Elle est très stubborn, vraiment c'est terrible, dépanner avec elle c'est, on était toujours en train de nous battre...pendant plusieurs semaines elle me détestait ouvertement....je gagnais toujours mais pour elle, mais maintenant c'est, elle a compris qui donne les calls puis elle fait ce que je dis et c'est correcte avec moi.

Coming to a mutual agreement seemed to be what allowed both parties to work well together:

Mais avec Child W quelque chose qui marche c'est je donne et je prends. Moi je travaille comme ça avec elle. So I'm asking you to do that, you did it there's no argument, you did it I'm the teacher, but I give you, dans ma classe she's the only one that has a table for her. She can do whatever she want on it, I don't care. By the way everyday she made a mess. Papers everywhere, elle découpe, il y a de la colle. I don't care, you do the work, you have, you do whatever. At the end of the day you clean it. So it's a deal that we have together, so you know what I give you something you give me something. (Teachers, Focus groups)

This strategy seems to be targeting one of the issues that is said to be coming from home:

...Tu gagnes à un tableau moi je gagne à l'autre. So c'est la seule façon que j'ai trouvée de gérer cette enfant là parce que vraiment la maison je pense que c'est beaucoup, tu fais ça. So she feel like my god I have no right I can't say anything. So the minute you give her something she will take it of course, she's human. C'est normal, c'est un moyen de défense. La situation elle peut prendre la contrôle qu'elle veut, c'est normal. I would do that too. (Teachers, Focus groups)

It seems Child W is testing the limits of her relationships, something re-echoed by others:

And she gets that stubborn streak because she wants to see how are we going to contain that, how are we going to deal with that. She tests us to see the relationship and how we are going to handle it, maybe even test to see how differently we handle it compared to how it's handled in different situations with either her mother or father right, so see those. And her brother reacts differently and you would expect that because not every child reacts the same. (T-team, Focus groups)

Furthermore, this idea of Child W's problematic home life negatively influencing her at school is mentioned through multiple examples, ranging from Child W's tendency to come in to school after the weekend with her previously non-productive behaviours, to Child W's role in the home being re-created at school:

I guess it's also Child W role in her family, she's sort of labeled as the one that creates the issues or that's the instigator and she's sort of taken on that role so it sounds like that's what she's re-creating at school. (T-team, Focus groups)

Her teacher also makes reference to Child W's mother being very negative towards her daughter:

J'ai vu sa mère deux fois puis les commentaires que j'ai reçue de cette femme-là à propos de son enfant ce n'était pas positif fait que je peux imaginer qu'est-ce qu'elle peut lui dire à la maison...Tu sais elle rentre dans la classe la première chose qu'elle dit c'est bon, qu'est-ce qu'elle a fait comme niaiserie dans l'école. Eh attends là, j'ai rien dit. Fait que, c'est un enfant qui manque du positif, de l'affection positif.

Interestingly, the same teacher recognizes the improvements made after the T-team intervened, specifically referring to the behaviour technician taking Child W out of class a couple of times a week, acting a positive female role model:

Mais avec le [T-team] ça va vraiment bien. J'ai vu vraiment une différence là de septembre à maintenant. Son travail est mieux, elle est intéressée, puis [the behaviour technician] vient la prendre chaque semaine une ou deux fois dépendant...ça fait une différence incroyable sur sa performance. C'est de l'attention positive, one on one avec une femme qui va envoyer une image positive de lui-même là. Ça donne un peu transformer la, elle est beaucoup mieux qu'elle était, au début de l'année c'était pathétique son affaire. Et là tu la vois elle pousse un peu plus.

The daycare educator also recognizes that Child W can be rude to others, but still seems to listen to her:

I see them in a different light because it's not the same thing at all in daycare. W has her issues, T less so than W. W I find she tends, not with myself but with the other daycare

educators, I find that at times she can be extremely rude and she has to be put in her place because with me never. She's always been ok with me but I know that with her own educator she can I've heard her and I've called her on it.

Possible reasons being tied to her attachment with her mother, or even the fact that she communicates with Child W's mother: "The attachment, and she knows that you speak to mother and that you have a relationship with her mother right." (T-team, Focus groups)

**Child T.** Child T is in grade 5. He lives with his mother and sister (who is in this project and referred to as Child W). His mother has a boyfriend who also has an older son (his son has a developmental delay). Child T's home was undergoing many renovations throughout the duration of the project, and so their living space was in transition.

Teachers point to the fact that Child T's home life has a strong influence on his behaviour and time at school. It seems as though Child T's school experience is directed by his mother's expectations,

...but this year I'm hearing wind that sometimes he sabotages his work because of things that are going on at home so again his engagement in the school I think is very dependent of what I think his mother is expecting from him and much more so then what we expect from him. (T-team, Focus groups)

Interestingly, there seemed to be differing experiences with Child T's mother. On the one hand resource teachers felt that his mother was grateful for the work being done with her and her son: "Principal has been working with Child T's mom who's been very grateful actually for everything. She's just like him though, just a chip off the old block, he's just like her I guess" (Specialists, Focus groups). On the other hand, the T-team members spoke of the resistance they encountered when working with his mother, shedding light on his mother's situation, and who has been attempting to bridge that gap,

...success despite of the fact that the mom was really resistant in terms of collaborating with us. That she was so fragile that she couldn't get herself to collaborate with us. So I'm glad to see some improvement with Child T. I think the art therapist has done a tremendous job in trying to get mom to see the dynamics between the two [siblings].

Many of the discussions around Child T are also in relation to his sister, Child W. The dynamic at school between these two siblings suggests that they do not get along: "...the two of them together, it's like oil and water, it's horrible, they're horrible together..." (T-team, Focus groups). There seems to be a recognized difference between the two siblings, with Child T being described as more overt, and willing to directly express his opinions, "Child T is like right in your face and tells you exactly what it is, right – Mais...J'ai l'impression que les gens qui sont comme

ça s'en sortent plus facilement. C'est dur d'en être prise dans toi même" (Teachers, Focus groups). He also seems to be a little more flexible than his sister, with teachers commenting on how, "Child W you know is just gonna [say no]. Him you know he's gonna say no, and then he kind of comes around..." (Specialists, Focus groups). Others comment on the differing reactions between siblings, pointing to the fact that they have different needs:

...but he has very different needs. I feel from what I've seen he doesn't shut down as much in the face of academics. He I think tries to contain his emotions a little more but it comes out in other ways, such as you know the regression in his behaviour... (T-team, Focus groups).

Generally speaking, in school Child T is described as a creative child who has difficulties controlling his behaviour and anger when something goes wrong: "...so Child T was [at the office] because he was mad because he couldn't do math work. He was very rude and disruptive and it's all the teacher's fault" (T-team, Focus groups). One of the specialists mentions his reluctant attitude towards trying anything others suggest:

Oh ya he doesn't like suggestions and stuff at all...cause he's making interesting things but I'm thinking ok he wants kids to come play with him, don't want them laughing at him, you want it to be something good. And so I'm like make something in the arcade you have to throw in or get it on top of something and he's like grrrr and then he makes it right, and he's like here I made this for you. This is for you, cause you wanted it, kind of thing. He's like a grumpy old man, he has zero patience. Oh my gosh if something doesn't work for him, holy...

At a certain point, Child T's behaviour became increasingly difficult to manage. He ended up spending the mornings in his classroom but spent the afternoons in the resource room. The specialists speak to how Child T needs to have a space where he can feel safe in order to try a little harder:

Well Child T for sure has a lot of anger towards what he can't do which he transfers to the person who trying to help him and with kids like that it's if there's a relationship if they feel safe, if it's quiet, they'll do at least they'll try a little harder, which is next to impossible to do in the classroom right, you got all kids there and he just makes it all personal because that's a good escape for him. I see that over and over, the work is really hard but he won't allow anyone in to help him, just a circle. But in between building a lego boat and a talking about how you throw up in a boat when you open a window he was doing some times tables.

Creating this opportunity for Child T to engage in activities that he enjoys and pull at his strengths, seems to be viewed as a positive strategy:

He's building and creating and whatever - That's good, that's his creative outlet - Stuff is taking over my room, it's hilarious. He seems to be better but he really hates those teachers, they hate me I hate them bah bah. So a half day he seems to be able to handle to keep himself together, do what he needs to do so that he can have that outlet in the afternoon. (Specialists, Focus groups)

Emphasis seems to be placed on positive relationships for Child T's future success, pointing to how he would benefit from guidance to stay out of trouble:

I think with Child T though, until he figures out that there's a reason for doing it, he's just, you know when he figures out what he wants to do, and that might not happen until 18 really - And then by then he could be on the path of drugs and - That's it, so hopefully he makes some relationships that will keep him on the right path until it clicks in, ok so I need to get my math and this so I can be an architect, or I can be a technical drawer, or I can go and do - He has to find teachers that understand that not everyone fits a certain mold...So hopefully there's a few teachers along his path in life, that will understand that - Accept who he is – he's quite brilliant and he's you know, doesn't fit. He's not following societal norms. (Specialists, Focus groups)

It seems that positive and safe relationships with adults as well as a safe space to be exert creative control over his projects and learning are details that have been noticed about Child T as a learner.

### **I-Click Photography as a Collaboratively Defined Tool**

This project involved spending a significant amount of time with each child. Through the building of these relationships, we were able gain an understanding of how these children were responding to and developing the project. It also gives us a glimpse into the ways in which photography may have been used as a tool for the needs/wants of each child. One of the themes that seems to re-occur in many of the following summaries is the importance of creative control and child autonomy throughout the project as a result of the process of using photography. During the following discussion, we also take note of some of the adult perceptions of each child's scrapbook from the photo exhibition. Each of the summaries below are informed by field notes, child interviews, and focus group discussions.

**Child E.** Child E seemed to use this project as a form of documentation for her life at school. Just as photographs are a form of preserving memory, her co-construction of this project appeared to follow suit. On several occasions, Child E reports on how "I decided to take a

picture of it to never ever forget about it.” One of which includes a photo of a crest hung up in the hallway. It was made up of all the things that she liked: “that’s mine see...that’s my name...we made what we like. Like I like Canada, I like McDonalds, umm I like the Canadian flag and I like dogs.” She wanted to take a photograph of it so that she can remember it once it was taken off the wall. Her photographs appear to act as a form of remembrance for certain moments and may even be helpful in communicating what she needs.

Through our conversations about her photographs, Child E communicates her ideas in a simple and to the point fashion. She tends not to elaborate too heavily on the reasons behind her photographs, nor does she spend much time talking about how she felt about them. For instance, she describes a picture of her teacher being important because “she’s my teacher.” When prompted further, she often responded with “I got nothing.” However, when asked a question she couldn’t remember the answer to, she responds by declaring, “wait I can show you” and uses her photographs and scrapbook to do so. At one point, she talks about one of her peers not being nice to her. When asked how she felt about it, she seemed to have difficulty responding. She proceeded to draw attention to a photograph she took about how she felt: “uhm. I think I took a picture of how I feel maybe...That’s a picture of how I feel. I said to a friend, I feel sad... Yeah, that’s, that’s how I feel.” According to Child E this photograph of the faces of drama, found in the hallways of the school, was used to represent her feelings of sadness over a situation with her peer. Overall, Child E may have utilized this platform as a way to remember and represent certain aspects of her life at school, and how she felt about them.

On several occasions, Child E makes reference to moving away. She talks about going to live somewhere far with many trees, where she might be able to get a dog. On the one hand, the prospect of getting a dog seems to sway her thoughts of moving in a positive direction. On the other hand, she discusses the problematic situation of potentially not being able to see her friends at school and not getting to eat her ice cream: “well it’s good. It’s a bit good. But I only have 2 problems, I can’t see my friends at school and you and everyone else and I can’t have my ice cream because over there there’s no ice cream.” This may have contributed to her tendency to ascribe photography with a way to remember her time at school. It may have also acted as a supportive transition tool, being able to capture and remember her friends, teachers, and important work from school in her scrapbook.

After speaking to her mother, it turned out Child E had misunderstood the situation. Although they were moving into a different house, they were not moving neighborhoods. Child E and her brother were, however, going for a visit to their grandmother’s home which is a little further away and is what her mother thought Child E was possibly referring to.

Another emergent pattern specific to Child E points to an understanding that there is both a positive and a negative side to people and situations. In her scrapbook, she includes a photograph of her mother, someone she describes as a caregiver who can also be mean sometimes. Mention of her teachers are related to both people she has affinity for and people who bother her a bit. When talking about her moving, she makes sure to include the pros and cons of the situation. In all, this can be interpreted as an awareness of the fact that relationships and life experiences are not always all good or all bad.

**Scrapbook.** Finally, looking at her scrapbook, it is full of photographs of the people in her life, friends, family, and adults at school. She includes little notes throughout the book stating, “When you see this there will be things that are in my life, and my friends and my mommy.” (Figure 1). She also includes a note about how much she loves her photos, “I love my pictures.”

The adults of the school who saw her scrapbook seemed confused about the reasons or importance around her photographs: “The person I felt was a little odd was Child E” (T-team, Focus groups). They were pointing to the fact that Child E seemed very engaged in her storytelling but did not give much substance to her explanations:

Was she not engaged? - No, she could have talked to me for like 2 hours. She was yacking away - So she had pictures and she couldn't really tell me why...she would say something but it was sort of made up, like and it didn't make sense. Now she's only in grade one, but she's another kid who I feel is pretty smart and pretty sharp - I found hers very disjointed and she didn't seem to know why she had picked the pictures and what they meant. Or was it cause I was like the twelfth person that came by, I don't know, they're kids. (T-team, Focus groups)



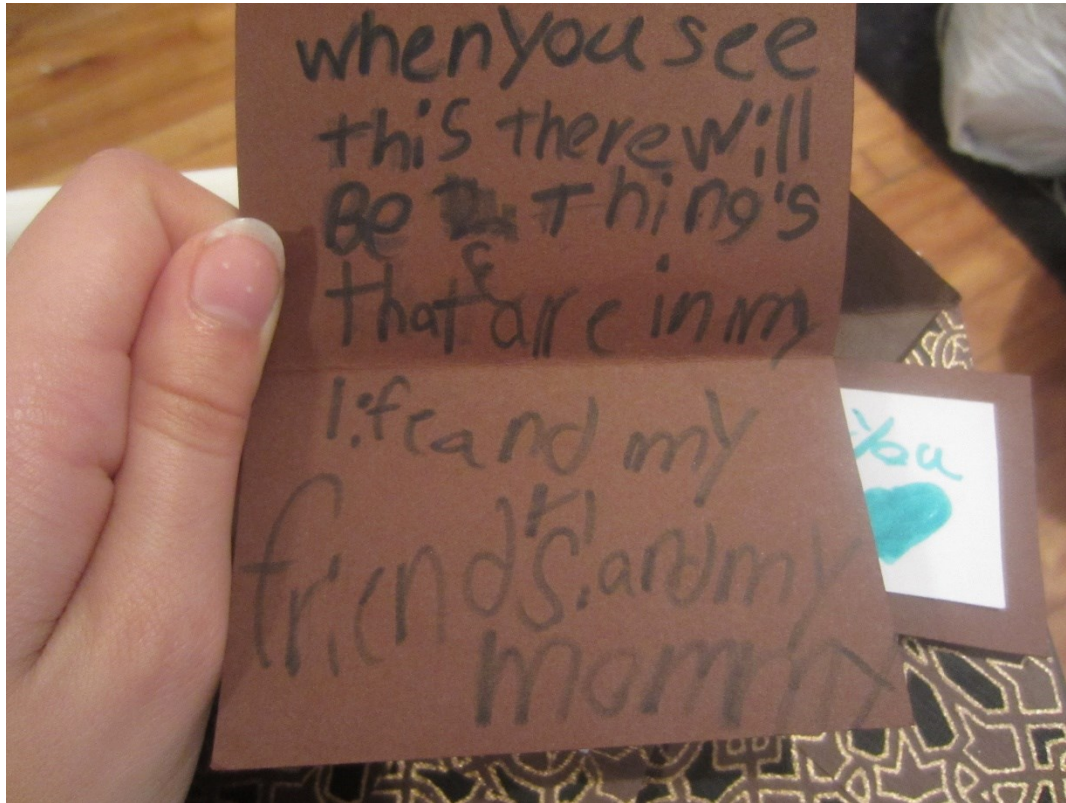


Figure 1. Child E scrapbook message

They were also commenting on the absence of any photos of her father and brother. As Child E also communicated similarly during the project interviews, it may be that there is gap between how she is trying to communicate and what the adults around her are understanding. She may be using the photos as a way to tell her story without words. The photos may be her way of capturing a moment and representing it without the use of words.

Finally, Child E is the only child who requested feedback for her scrapbook, asking everyone who saw her scrapbook if they liked it or not. The last page of her book was dedicated to having everyone write yes or no to this question and some even signed their names. It seemed like a similar idea to signing a yearbook. This may possibly also be linked to her tendency to use this project as a tool to capture memories.

**Child H.** Child H had a particular tendency to associate what was cool and funny to what would please others around him. It seems as though photographs representing personal interests were not interpreted as items that others would be interested in:

Because they all make me feel good and they're supposed to make my friends laugh not cry I mean not feel supposed to make them feel funny and giggle and laugh and none of these would do that, except probably that one [Why won't any of these do that?]

Ummmm because they all make me feel good and none of them would make anybody laugh because none of them are ugly and none of them are funny.

Child H seems to make the distinction between what others want to see and what makes him feel good, stating that he does not want to show others what is important to him because it would be of no interest to them. These are the pictures he decided he wanted to keep to himself.

He brought up the fact that children would laugh at something cool and funny. However it is not always something that would make him feel good. For example, he talks about how everyone would think 'the tower' would be really cool but then goes on to say that it is something that does not make him feel safe because the tower could fall on you. When he talks about what he would want his peers to know about some of his pictures, he seems to always refer to things being funny, cool, or something they would love or that would make them laugh:

Yeah I'll show it to everybody in my class actually. Everyone in the whole school it like a whole meeting in the gym and I'm on stage showing the picture that would be cool. That it's like a really funny joke and that a dog's standing up and he's all dressed up. I just want them to laugh, laugh their butts off. All laugh their, laugh their asses off. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Child H humorous poster: "I did the math. We can't afford the cat."

He also comments on how people want to laugh and how he wants to show other children things that he knows they like: "Well yeah, cause everybody loves [it]...Everybody loves it and I know, so might as well show them." Interestingly, the only other times he really mentions other kids at school is when he is talking about his "worst enemy". I'm not sure that other children at school are viewed as a very accepting social resource. It seems like he wants to present what he thinks others will accept/really like. This seems to fall in line with the pressures his mother may be putting onto him to make friends by being the class clown, something discussed in the teacher focus groups.

Another area which Child H does not seem comfortable sharing is about things that are his "worst ever", and he "never wants it". He appears to be quite critical and hard on himself, especially in relation to his academics and art work. When speaking about his work in school, he makes reference to his disappointment, thinking that it is just not good work. He also seems to make critical comments about himself, such as "I suck because of my mom", "I suck", or "it's my fault, I failed." These are comments that have been made throughout the project, but that Child H chose not to share in his scrapbook.

Child H also seems to highlight his attachment to his family quite often. He talks about wanting to give his mother and his stepdad a photograph so that they can remember him, "I took a picture of that so that my mom can remember what my hand looks like." This may be related to the fact that his stepdad had to move back to South Africa. Child H also talks about hanging up a photo of a flag so that he and his stepdad can remember each other:

Oh I might hang it up cause like I wanna remember my stepdad but my stepdad wants to remember me and we already have one thing that's why I don't want me to have two and he has one that's why I might hang it up but he's probably going to hang it up himself. If you ask me I would let him, but if he doesn't I want to hang it up.

Interestingly, when taking a closer look at some of the photographs he wants to show his family, it may not simply be to share his life at school, but possibly Child H is also selecting photographs that he thinks will make his family happy:

My mom would love it if I show it to her. I would be like close your eyes and she would be like, probably going to faint, cause she loves penguins. It's her favourite thing so ya that's the only reason I just wanted to show my mom the penguin there.

Although similar to his tendency to show cool and funny photographs to his peers, he may feel his family is more accepting of things that are of interest to him also.

**Scrapbook.** Finally, his scrapbook seemed to reflect the discussions above, with sweet messages to his mother written on one of his pages ("love you more sweet dreams more good

night more love caks more”), photos representing what he likes and dislikes, and things that are cool and funny. An envelope in the back of his book includes photos of the things that he enjoys, things he wanted to show his family, and things that represented his family.

Interestingly, when viewed, many comments were about the combination of opposites, odds and evens (Figure 3). The T-team pointed to the fact that he had many, “pros and cons - ...what a book. Every picture was like, he had a picture of odds and evens, good and then not so good... - ...it was all linear, it was all categorized, it was unbelievable.” According to the T-team, Child H had explained his photographs in a similar manner, “...even when some of the pictures were not labeled odd and even, he then explained them in terms of odd and even.”

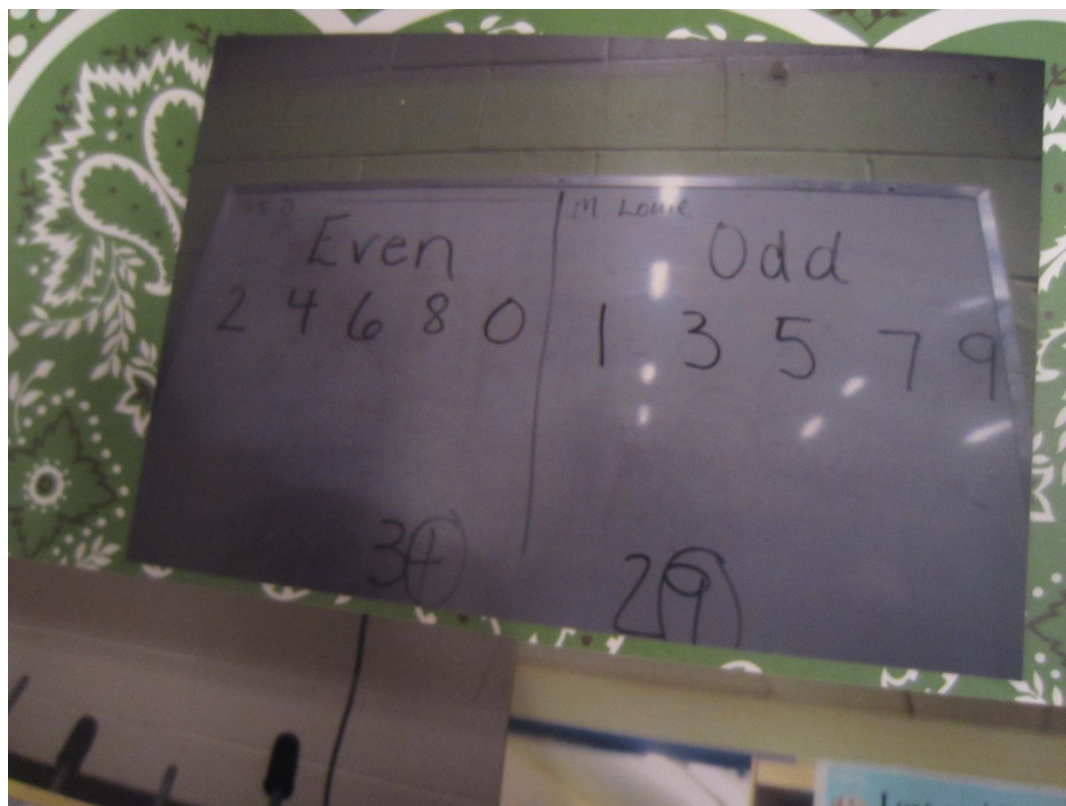


Figure 3. Child H odds and evens board

His scrapbook seemed to be interpreted as the way in which Child H thinks, “That’s how he sees his world. So bright, maybe he sees his world in spreadsheets” and how difficult it may sometimes be for him, “But imagine how hard it is for the little guy to be constantly careful. Imagine decision making, like trying to figure out the pros and cons of things.” Comments from the T-team appear to be tapping into this idea that there are two sides of Child H, however, they seem to have interpreted it through pros and cons.

**Child L.** The sessions with Child L went a little differently than some of the other children in the project. He was much more interested in creating short videos than he was in taking



pictures. And so, that is what we did. He seemed to engage in the creative process, enjoying the control he had over what he was developing. He even got involved in the technical side of things, learning to use the Microsoft Movie Maker program to put everything together and create stop-motion videos. Child L took the time to adjust details such as how fast or slow the video would go, the sequencing, and little messages he wanted to show up (if any). He also appeared to enjoy watching the final product and seemed to even feel proud of his work: “[What’s your favourite part about this movie?] Is that I did it really good.”

Child L seemed to engage in this project by taking control and making decisions on who he would like to show or not show his videos to. At one point one of the researchers asked to watch his video and he refused. Other times, he suggested this could be seen by the school. At one point he makes reference to the fact that his video is not appropriate to show because it has too much violence for younger kids: “No. Cause. It gives bad ideas. To younger ones, violence.” It may be that he is reflecting on how his videos would be perceived. By the end of the project, Child L had decided not to show anyone his videos, nor would he allow his videos to be part of the photo exhibition. However, on the day of the exhibition, he changed his mind and decided he wanted his videos included for everyone to see.

Based on conversations with other adults in the school, it seemed as though they had a difficult time engaging Child L. It may be possible that his level of engagement and commitment to this project had to do with the level of control and ownership he had on his work as well as the level of investment he was willing to put in. He does not seem to appreciate ideas pushed onto him. At one point, he showed me a stop motion video on youtube where they used post-its. He seemed really enthused by this video and so I suggested trying it out. He agreed, but went really quiet and seemed to lose interest. We did not end up carrying out the video and did another one of his ideas instead.

Moreover, this idea of being in control over how much he invests in something seems to be reflected in some of Child L’s decisions about his videos. During the video making process, there were a few times where Child L would prematurely decide that something he wanted to do was not going to work. He would give up on something before even attempting or finding out if it was possible. He seemed surprised that I had kept the lego set he built for his teleporting car video and before even asking if it was still around, he simply assumed it was destroyed: “The things already destroyed. Probably.” Furthermore, although Child L would propose ideas for his next videos, he seemed very insecure about how these were going to be received, presenting them negatively, “I was just thinking of a dumb thing. It would be like, make something like that out of lego. Like a dumb thing...” He may be covering his bases so that if it doesn’t work out,

there is less perceived disappointment. He seems to be afraid to invest in his ideas and activities.

Another observation that came out of working with Child L on this project, was his emphasis on play, or simply having fun. He makes reference to being allowed to play at school, saying “[The picture] shows that you're allowed to do stuff...Yeah. I don't really play with that much like funny things. Technically I just play.” During our sessions, Child L had moments of silly behaviour, making funny jokes, and just seemed to be offering his sense of humour. On several occasions, Child L simply stated that the reasons behind a photograph was, “I don't know. I took it...just for fun.”

In the end, Child L had both a compilation of short stop motion videos, and a short scrapbook consisting of photographs he took from his father's home. There were multiple photos of the animals at his house, as well as a one of him and a couple of his father.

**Stop-Motion Videos.** Some of the themes in the stop motion videos may signal this project being used as a way to explore and communicate certain thoughts, ideas, and/or emotions he had in a way where he retained control over their expression and they continued to reside in a playful activity.

*Janitor.* During the time of his sessions, the janitor was retiring. Child L created a stop-motion video highlighting the janitor at the end. He also seemed to have a great time sneaking around the school to take pictures of him. After being asked, one of his pictures was even included in the school assembly (which he seemed really happy about). During the week the janitor was retiring, it was the only thing Child L was interested in (he was just not into the videos he was currently making, and so they ended up walking around the school. This is when he made the video highlighting the janitor). He may have used this project as a way to help him express certain thoughts and emotions around the janitor leaving the school.

*Teleportation.* In this video, Child L is coming in and out of the room, waving. He seemed to be coming in and out of existence, possibly representing the fact that he does not normally take up space, or may not feel present. He also did a teleportation theme using a car. He may be alluding to a way to escape from something, run away, or hide.

*Dinosaurs.* During these videos, there are scenes where things are being built up, and then torn down. Nothing really lasts, nothing really moves forward. Many, if not all of his video clips seem to represent small moments in time. Although there is a start and finish, the end doesn't really reflect much progression from the beginning. It does not seem to be a story so much as it is a short expression of an idea.

**Snorting Coke.** In this video, he took some powdered candy in a spoon and pretended it was drugs. During the session he was in a particular mood and seemed to be trying to push the boundaries of what is appropriate. It seemed to be less about drugs, and more about wanting to do something that he knew was not accepted/appropriate (something with shock, or attention). After the session, he didn't really refer to this video again.

**Drums.** In this video we went to the drama room and he took out the drums and taught me how to play. We recorded a short song together. He told me about how he would spend time with his music teacher and learned the drums. This was a really interesting session because it was one of the few times he revealed something that he enjoyed doing and was good at. After putting the video together on the movie maker program, I asked him if he wanted to show this video to anyone. He refused. It is interesting how he keeps parts of himself hidden. Even during one of his sessions when asked what bothers him, he mentions how he doesn't know, how he doesn't like or not like anything. He doesn't seem to want, or maybe know how, to reveal details about himself. Again, it seems as though he may be hesitant to allow others to invest in him.

**Scrapbook.** After seeing his videos and scrapbook the adults in the school comment on his level of engagement in the project, and his relationship with his family. All in all, the specialists commended him on his creativity ("Child L was very creative. Like you can see") and seemed surprised at the level of effort and follow through it takes to complete a project like this: "It must have taken him a long time to do it. It's neat that he stuck with that, and accomplished that. Cause he doesn't stick with too much right now." There was also mention of the fact that he allowed his work to be viewed by everyone in the room:

...And it's also neat cause he didn't want to come right, at first. He wasn't going to show anybody and the fact that he actually did come and he did actually participate and show a few people – He could have been out of the room, he could have said no. And he watched who was looking so it meant a lot to him. (Specialists, Focus groups)

Although he does not seem to accept compliments for his work, the adults seem to interpret his engagement and completion of the project as a sign that he is proud of what he has accomplished:

I tried to compliment him on that, he didn't want to hear it. No no no, no, like he stopped me. Must have taken a lot of work, it was very hard. He just sort of didn't talk about it. He must have loved doing it, wouldn't you say?! Yeah. He wouldn't have done it if he didn't want to - Well it also shows that he can start and finish something and be proud of that fact, which I think is very big for him he needs to have that feeling of accomplishment... -

But it was nice to see that he finally did it, you know followed through. (T-team, Focus groups)

In terms of his family, Child L only included photos of animals and his father. This seemed to be surprising, “I was just really really taken aback with the absence of adult figures except for his dad but the presence of so many animals” (T-team, Focus groups). Others added, “his mom was not anywhere, his sister and brother not – he even had the dog he doesn’t like there. He can’t stand the dog but his picture was there. Surprising” (T-team, Focus groups). Some thought perhaps something may have happened between Child L and his mom that they were not aware of:

And not his mother. I was surprised I don't know where he's at with his mom, I don't know if something bothered him in one of the recent, I don't know but I just, I was surprised not to find any part of her there. (T-team, Focus groups)

Other T-team members thought it might have more to do with trying to get attention from his father:

I guess cause [his mother is] that constant in his life and his father is the one he's always seeking but then that's natural right. You're always going to try harder with the person who's not there for you and the one who's there for you all the time you kind of take for granted and don't really put in that extra effort. So that's what I kind of, I thought he's not that there's a problem with her, but he's just taking her for granted and his focus is on his dad, that's what he wants, that's what he's trying to get, his attention.

There was also more of a focus on the concern for the lack of human relationships presented in his scrapbook:

...but I was also surprised at the fact that there was just like no humans except for his dad. That there were no humans, there was no one, there was not a teacher - No friend, his aid - Not a teacher, not a family, not one person. It was only animals. And I didn't know quite how to interpret that. I didn't know what to do with that, I was just surprised at that. That he was just so detached from those relationships in his book, you know. (T-team, Focus groups)

Some of the T-team members attempt to interpret this, explaining “those were his safe relationships, the ones with animals. But the dad wouldn’t really apply then though but -That's what makes him happy - No strings attached right, like unconditional. But the dad doesn't paint that picture.”

Interestingly, Child L did in fact take many photographs of his mother, sister, and brother at his mother’s home. He chose to keep those photographs separate, and did not put them into



any scrapbook. He simply chose to keep them and take them home. This seemed to be something private, that he did not want to share with the school. It seemed to be something just for him and his family.

**Child O.** So much of what Child O draws attention to seems to have to do with belonging. He consistently makes reference to the people around him, even going as far as directly stating, “you need people to live.” Participating in the Peter Pan play, taking Hebrew lessons afterschool, being a part of the homework program, even being part of this I-Click photography club, are all activities Child O describes as important (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Child O scrapbook mention of the Peter Pan play

He also talks about enjoying group work, inviting other children in the project to join him during his scrapbooking sessions, and even allowing younger children in the hallway to be part of his photos upon request. When looking back to that photograph with the younger students, he says it makes him feel happy. Overall, it seems as though the people in his life are what are important to him, and they are the ones that seem to help define his school experience.

This general sense of safety and comfort with those around him seems to translate to a generally positive association to school. Child O seems to feel as though his basic needs are met at school, pointing to the fact that he can make snacks and referring to food as an important aspect of life. Furthermore, Child O doesn't seem to stray away from a challenge. He brings up

video games as something that is hard to win, but still fun to do, “because it's fun and you're free.” He mentions learning new things as enjoyable. He even talks about how he enjoys this photography project because he can continue to remember his experiences while learning something new: “it's fun, and you finally get to do something that I've never done before.” Finally, there appears to be a sense of pride in the effort he puts into his work. When doing homework assignments he points to the fact that, “yeah I did the background. I was the only one that did the background of this.”

**Scrapbook.** When looking at his scrapbook, it is full of photographs representing different relationships he has at school. From teachers, and specialists, to his peers and group activities he is part of, his scrapbook appears to be full of representations of belonging. One of the T-team members comments,

I think that's the one that kind of touched my heart. I kind of couldn't, I couldn't stay there long enough, I couldn't bring myself to back off asking him questions, because he was so open and so wanted you to know about everything. At the same time he was, it seemed to be still a work in progress, he was kind of looking at the other kids and it's almost like he figured out that he could get enough with the book. I don't know I just took that away.

Another member of the team described an observed change in Child O during the last stages of the project,

...the one thing I liked was during this whole process, like towards the end of this project, I don't know what he was discovering with himself again, but he was wearing layers and layers and layers and now the layers were coming off again. One it could be some kind of metamorphosis to it's too hot, but I'm likely to think that he's exploring things that were bothering him a little bit and it's going away, I hope. Because he has a lot to be bothered by.

It seems as though he may be gaining a sense of belonging within his current surroundings in this school through his relationships with individuals in school.

**Child R.** Child R's project seemed to reflect the resources he uses for support. He focuses on what contributes to his learning, what makes him feel safe, and the people around him. He arranged his scrapbook in themes, covering the things he learns from, the places that are special to him, a page all about him, and the people in his life that support him. The T-team commented on how well thought out they felt his book was, saying,

I was really impressed by his book. He put a lot of effort into that – Just how everything has a meaning behind it... - ...attention to detail cause each one of those pages could

have been framed, you know. They were complete, I felt like they were story unto themselves

Although he doesn't mention home very often (aside from his lizard and choosing which photograph to bring home), his scrapbook is full of representations of family. He includes photographs of his siblings, his mother, and his pets and couples them with stickers quoting the importance of family: "A family is a circle of friends who love you"; "Family, I love you"; and "Families are Forever" (Figure 5). A photograph of his mother is paired with a sticker that says, "You are my sunshine." He also stuck in photographs of things at home that are important to him, such as his favourite TV show, kitchen appliances, an award he won, and a photo of him with his baseball team.



Figure 5. Child R scrapbook message about family

Interestingly, there is also a theme of self-identity in some of the explanations Child R has for his photographs. As he explains, Child R would like to show his photographs to others in order to share his point of view. He chooses a photograph of himself to bring home and show his mother how cool he looks, something he feels represents him. When Child R felt misrepresented, it seemed bothersome to him. He points out a photograph of him and his class hung up at school, right outside the gym, describing it as not representative of him. After a

presentation, he was in a bad mood that day and he says he looks mokey. It is bothersome because he does not identify with this version of himself, saying it is not him. He states,

The pictures because I was moping...It's a picture of my class while there was a presentation. When I was moping...That it's not really me. [So what is really you?] Proud. [So how does the picture make you feel?] Like I'm lonely. Because it shows no happiness. [...And why don't you want to show this to anybody?] Because it's my precious. Cause it's Smiegel.

There seems to be a desire to be properly represented and understood by others, possibly implying that he does not always feel that people have the version that coincides with who he feels he is.

With this idea of identity in mind, it is interesting to note how Child R's scrapbook really seemed to leave an impression on the adults that had a chance to see it. It appears they really listened to what he had to say, and the photographs seemed to help solidify some of the messages:

The one picture that really stood out as the absolute most phenomenal picture in terms of representation was Child R, with the 2 doors - Oh yes - Oh ya! - And how he explained that, and how he says I open those doors for the people I who I want to open them for - He's so expressive that one - Floored, absolutely floored. (T-team, Focus groups)

Others comment on Child R's family photographs,

And when he said to me the center of my life is my mother and he, you saw the picture of his mother just beaming, I just - She's lovely - So powerful - And he is too. His whole thing made me feel really good. He's gonna be fine. Child R is gonna be fine. Right now he's just marose sometimes, Eeyore Eeyore. He says to me that's my favourite character. It's very fitting. (T-team, Focus groups)

His book may have helped members of the team understand some of the potentially misunderstood poetry he had written earlier that had caused concern, "True artist - Very much attention to detail - Which is why in his poetry, might be a bit upsetting, it because he's not going to go off soft on the details, he's going to give them to you." (T-team, Focus groups)

It seems that his photographs gave the T-team members an insight into Child R's world that they did not have before. This insight may have contributed to a more positive outlook on Child R,

...Because at the beginning we knew him a little bit we all had this perception of Child R he was angry, he was this, he was that. And by now we're getting to know him and now

seeing his book and now seeing the importance of family and seeing how he's got so well kept, for me now changes my perception of Child R. I know that now I, like because of those pictures, because of that book, it's easier now to advocate with them, especially for next year and say that mom is approachable, that mom you can talk to, there's hope there. So for me, that's that's huge. It really changed my view of him and how to deal with him. (T-team, Focus groups)

It is interesting to note that this project allowed Child R to express himself in the way he saw fit, and in so doing, a shift in perception may have emerged in his surroundings.

**Child T.** Although Child T did end up working on a scrapbook, he also engaged in this project through the creation of short narrated movies. He spent a portion of his sessions building the set and characters for his stories out of lego, and then, once completed, filmed the story he was creating. Importance seemed to be placed on the fact that he is the one creating these videos, using his building skills which is something he is known for in the school:

It's because I know how to build. I think you noticed that about a month ago or so.

Everyone knows I know how to build. I'm probably one of the bestest builders in the whole school. I'm probably one of the bestest builders in the whole school. Because I'm that good... (Child T)

It sounds as though he positively identifies with this marker, feeling happy and creative when thinking about what he creates:

And the dinosaurs they come down and like, once I get older and I wanna watch a video and I don't have any, I just watch this and, like, wow. Yeah, I won't be, it'll be worth ten dollars for all the episodes, but this is still worth it. They're fun, and their creativity. [How to you feel about the videos?] Happy cause they're made and creative and they're doing what I like. (Child T)

There are patterns that Child T's videos seemed to follow, both in terms of the content, and the way in which the narrative was carried out. In his videos, Child T mentions the importance of character development, dedicating certain parts of the video to details about the characters' backgrounds. Some of his characters had particular roles, such as inventors, fish men, captains, and treasure seekers, while others had special tools, such as special boots.

When looking at the content of the narratives, themes of treasure, violence, and being drunk emerged. Treasure seems to be what the characters are trying to attain. It is associated with something to keep safe, something that will bring protection for the character, something that needs to be shared when on a sharing island, but also something that brings violence from

those that are trying to steal it. Child T narrates a story about a character finding gold and drinking to celebrate:

Dum dum dum dum dum dum. I want to eat something. Or maybe drink. Cheers, for collecting all the gold. Yummy yum. I think I'm drunk. I drank too much wine. I'm gonna go get my treasure. I'm gonna put it back in my trunk. Now I'm gonna bring this, probably. And then afterwards, I'm gonna do maybe this. Like maybe I should bring some wine too, I really like the wine. Or maybe some fish to eat too. Maybe I should put the fish in here. Oh no, the fish fell out. Oh my god stop frowning fishy. Now I'm going to drive. Oh no, it fell out of the seat. Whoops, I knocked the tree over! Oh who cares. Dee dee dee deee. The end.

This storyline may be associated to his father's difficult history with drinking. Child T explains how his father used to drink but doesn't anymore. He appears to have strong opinions about getting drunk: "No one gives a crud about drunk people. I said drunk people. No- they're stupid! If you were the smartest man in the world, you go glug-glug, like that, you have no idea what they're talking about."

Looking further into the violent acts in his movie plots, there is reference to death and self-harm. At times Child T decides to save his characters (such as when they all come back to life, or when they can get back on the boat if they fall) and in other situations, he does not. There are also instances of making reference to causing harm to oneself. He brings up a situation where he would rather cause harm to himself than to a cow:

Because if a cow eats them, we have to kill the cow. But I won't kill the cow. Yeah I know I eat them, but I don't kill them. As long as I don't kill them then I have to kill myself if I do. I love cows, I can't hurt them

During other instances, Child T incorporates themes of self-harm into what he says about his story plots, "Most of the point is trying to kill yourself. Most of the point that everyone else says is for them to not kill themselves." Lastly, the only other reference made to anything violent, is when he talks about himself and his anger:

My forehead hurts from all that stress. No, when I go hulk or get really hulk angry, ooh, I break- I can literally just- let's say that were furniture, right? I would literally even take a hammer, something real hard. I've done it, I've went into Thor mode and I've took a hammer, smashed my wall. And I've also gone into hulk mode where someone pissed me off so much I actually punched the wall- a hole through my wall.

During the process of Child T's movie making, he seemed to be aware of certain social norms, or guiding principles in his environment. He appears to understand what is expected in any

given scenario, such as reporting a piece of troubling information to the teachers. He acts as though he has no choice in the matter, like this is his duty: “you shouldn't have told me that. Cause now I get to tell Miss X.” The idea of following norms appears in his movies as well such as when his characters have to share on the sharing island. Child T was also willing to give credit, where credit was due. Anything that others helped him with during his video making, he made sure to acknowledge. He also seemed to give himself credit by stating that his movies will “...be worth ten dollars...”

Other observations led to an understanding that Child T speaks in a very direct manner, requesting something in quite a demanding way: “I don't need it to be like that. Maybe I need you to hold it. You're not listening. Hold!” When these demands were not carried out quickly enough, he appeared upset, and began questioning if we even wanted to help him, or had any interest in spending time with him or watching his videos. He seemed very quick to judge intention and uncertain about his own social acceptance.

Another tendency we noticed had to do with gender comparisons. He does not mention gender often but seems to be making reference to experiences he has had at home to attribute particulars to each gender. For example, he mentions how male and female underwear are different stating, “I have a mom and a sister at home, I know what female underwear looks like.” He continues to explain that if a woman is wearing boxers, she must have muscles, and that women don't have that problem where the underwear tag makes them itchy. Other comparisons had to do with knowledge. He points to women normally being right, and the fact that a woman knows more than a drunk man:

I was just going to say you're a woman but usually it's men that are stupid. No no, but sometimes it's actually women that think men are wrong, women are always right that's true. That's sometimes true, sometimes that actually is true, that women know more than men. Anything's possible, even if it's a theory, it's still possible. Like drunk men, obviously know less than women that aren't drunk. Just saying, it is true though, that is true

These gender comparisons do not re-emerge in later conversations, but may simply allude to a very categorical understanding of gender.

**Scrapbook.** With Child T identifying as a creator, a builder, I understood his scrapbook to be another one of his creations. It was a compilation of stickers, drawings, and photos that he cut up, all purposefully placed to convey special effects (Figure 6). Many of the photographs included were of the toys he used for his movies including dinosaurs, legos, cows, and many others.



Others that saw his scrapbook seemed somewhat confused. This perception of Child T as a creative child seemed to lead to an expectation that his photographs would have been about what he had created,

...I couldn't make sense really of Child T, it was all dinosaurs - ...being guarded and putting in just what they want us to see, I get that piece of it, but why just the dinosaurs? – And plastic dinosaurs, not even his creations, like he makes dinosaurs out of duct tape... - And he's so creative I'm surprised that he wouldn't show some of his work.



Figure 6. Child T's scrapbook creations

Still others pointed to the fact that the dinosaurs in his book were a representation of the room in which he spent his time and in which he may have felt a sense of comfort,

...because when he was telling me he was pointing over to where [the dinosaurs] were, and I wondered whether or not part of those pictures was...the climate that you've created for him or allowed him to have there. I didn't, if I had looked at the 2 headed [dinosaur] I would have said oh that's different, but I just wondered whether or not it was really about the room - He has a certain spot in that room that - That's what I thought.

In either case, there seemed to be an awareness that Child T was engaged and enjoyed the attention he was receiving at the photo exhibition, "...Like he wasn't disengaged, he wanted people to look at it. He normally enjoys that attention - And he enjoyed it, it went well"



**Child W.** Child W seemed to place a lot of value on distinction, ownership and privacy during her project. Throughout the project, Child W distinguishes between her work and the work of others, always giving credit to the creator. She brings up spaces that she claims as her own, art in the hallway that she has made, and even differentiates between her daycare group and the others. This pattern is highlighted when talking about her old daycare and how she was the only one that got to go to the store with the educator.

I would go out to the store and she would buy me stuff...No one else goes with her...She had a little girl... and she used to go to this daycare they used they're having a problem with her so at her daycare room they made her a little spot for her. And she was happy.

She appears to be tuning into this idea of a separate space as something positive that brings happiness. This may also possibly be linked to a sense of privacy as well. In all, she seems to enjoy scenarios where she is set apart from the rest and has her contributions and sense of belonging noticed.

Similar to her teacher's mention of Child W wanting to be in control of her tasks, we observed her taking hold of the decision making process, and challenging any suggestions she received about how to do her project. Given the fact that this project intended to adapt to each child's wants and needs, without any evaluative consequences, it may possibly have been a safe platform for Child W to explore some of what she seems to present as more personal.

This leads back to the idea of privacy that emerges with Child W. On several occasions, Child W mentions not wanting to show certain photographs representing things that are special to her. She explains, "Things that I like, things that are my friends, things that are my own stuff that I don't like showing other people." Child W talks about her collections as one of these things that she does not want to show others, "Collections. Oh now I remember. I was gonna start a collection of fairies and these glass little bears. I already have one glass bear and one plastic fairy, which is pretty."

**Scrapbook.** When looking at her scrapbook, there are actually very few photographs posted inside. It is mostly a scrapbook full of decorated blank pages (Figure 7). The photographs she did decide to include in her book to show others were mostly all in closed envelopes that she could decide to open and share if she so wished. Of these photographs, pictures of her pet cats, of a couple of her peers, and of her were included. Although this was what she decided to present at school, she had also prepared another set of photographs in a tinker bell album she had from home. These photographs were a combination of photos she took during the project, and photos she had from home of when she was young. These seemed

to be her collection of special photographs and although she brought it in to show me, I had explicit directions not to reveal the contents to anyone. She also decided to show it to one of her teachers. This focus on privacy tends to fall in line with her teachers experiences of her being closed or having difficulty letting others in and building secure relationships.



Figure 7. Child W scrapbook pages

Child W was yet another child who decided to make a couple of short videos during our time together. These videos were centered around play (both inside with dolls, toy cars, and toy homes, and outside playing in the puddles). She did not mention anything about her videos, nor did she really explain them to any of the other adults that saw them. But she did decide she wanted to include them in the exhibition.

Although the adults in the school were able to view her scrapbook and videos, no one brought up any details about it during our focus groups, aside from remarks by the specialists about the lack of representations of home life in her scrapbook. Instead they spoke about her tendencies in class, and their experiences with her and her family. Child W seemed to be at the forefront of their minds and given the chance to speak about her, details about their experiences with her is what took priority in conversation over details about her scrapbook.

### **How Students with EBD Perceive Their Learning Environments**

The emerging themes discussed below focus in onto how these children, chosen for their EBD, view their learning environments. While trying to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of school engagement and learning, themes fell into 3 overarching categories: home and school connections, school relationships and space, and finally the undesirable side of school. All themes have been compiled from the photo elicited storytelling of each child and therefore consists of a multitude of unique experiences. With classroom teachers, specialists, and the T-team weighing in through focus group discussions, these collection of themes (Table 2) attempt to describe the perspectives that form this learning environment and uncover what is significant in school for these seven children.

**Table 2**

*Collection of Child Themes*

Overarching Themes	Subthemes	Sub-Categories
Home and School	Sharing School	Child's Interests Mother's Interests
	Sharing Home	Family Members Experiences Privacy
School Relationships	Adults	Learning Socio-Emotional Needs
	Peers	Social belonging and help Negative Experiences
	Animals	Comfort
	School Spaces	Spaces for Play and Learning Safe Space
The Undesirable Side of School	Not Safe	
	Bugs Me	Issues with Relationships Issues with Surroundings

**Home and School Connections.** Whether it be wanting to show their mothers (e.g. Child H, Child E, Child T, Child W, and Child R) or talking about some experience at home (e.g. Child O, Child T, and Child H) it seems as though children's home lives are still implicated in their day to day school experiences. The following describes the ways in which children have drawn attention to the connection between home and school.

**Photos to Families: Sharing School.** Although family was not normally mentioned in association with their participation in school related activities, children seemed to have a strong interest in sharing their school life and interests with their family members through their photographs.

For many of the children participating in this project, their mothers were the primary family member they wanted to share their photographs with to show them what school is like. Certain photographs seem to represent elements of school that stand out to the children, while others seem more related to their mother's likes and interests. For example, Child H mentions showing his mother posters on the walls he finds amusing, educational, and creative (Figure 8):

I wanted to take a picture of this because like it's really cool how like kids made real honey...and like like the only reason I took a picture of that is because...whenever my mom comes I can show her it...So I would just show her every time I'm supposed to see it but it's a weekend, I would just show her it



Figure 8. Child H photograph of a honey project in the hallway

He also shows her different spaces in the school such as the behaviour technician's room:

The fridge and the computer because my mom doesn't know that there's a fridge in this place and my mom doesn't know there's a computer in this place. Because she doesn't know that it's at my school so it'll be a surprise.

Other photographs Child H expressed interest in showing his mother were of places and educational materials in the school that his mother would appreciate. He mentions wanting to share a photograph of a penguin, or telling her about the stories he has at school: “I just wanted to take a picture of this because my mom loves like these sort of stories and stuff. She loves this, that's the only reason for this...” Interestingly, this idea of showing mom what is relevant to her also comes through when Child E chooses a photograph to take home to show her mother a peer who she thinks her mother may already know: “ehh, my mommy knows him so I'll take him.” In addition, Child T and Child W seem to mention their mother in relation to the perceived approval she would have of what they have photographed or worked hard on. When asked who Child T would show his videos to, he responded “...mostly my mom...I made them for her...but I know she'll like it.” Although Child W does not always refer to her school experiences in the most positive manner, she seems keen on highlighting positive aspects of school when mentioning what she will show her mother. She talks about her hard work, what things look like, the fun she has, and the positive relationships she has made at school with certain adults: “Cause it's something I worked hard by doing. Look.”

Unlike the rest of the children, Child L and Child O did not mention their mothers while discussing their photographs. Child L had taken many photos at home with his mother and siblings, but did not want to talk about them, nor did he want to show them at the exhibition. His home life at his mother's place seemed to be a very private, personal context that he did not want to draw attention to.

***Stories of Home: Sharing Home.*** As some children allude to, school seems to hold opportunities to think about family. Whether it be sharing information about family members, circumstance, or differences between home and school, photographs taken at school seemed to open a dialogue around family life.

While walking around the school, certain children stopped to talk about what was hung up on the walls and how it related to their families. Child E points to how she represented her family in a drawing activity carried out in her classroom:

ok, this one, you know it says maman...ya, and that one is here, my gramma. That's my brother. Ok I'll just go like this. Me, umm my brother, my uncle, my mom, my gramma, my other gramma, cause I have three grammas. This one her husband and umm, that's my mom's friend, and my other uncle...

Child H also makes reference to his family when he spotted a South African flag in the hallway (Figure 9) and linked it to his stepdad's nationality: “Well, the only reason I wanted to take it so



that I can bring it home and show my stepdad what it is because you see he's from South Africa."



Figure 9. Child H South-African flag

While bringing up family, mothers were mentioned most often, however not all children spoke of their mothers similarly. When Child E mentions her mother in her photographs, she is the only child who directly spoke about her mother being bothersome at times, describing her mother as being harsh. Child E explains,

That's my mom. And she really bugs me...And she's really harsh. When she's being mean. I would say a 6 on 5...No wait, a 1 on 2. Well really, its 0 on 1. Really the lower numbers the more meaner and the more high numbers the more nicer.

At first she gave her mother a rating of 6 on 5, (6 being level of mean and 5 being level of nice), but when further prompted to explain, her ratings fell down to a 0 on 1. It seems as though there are aspects of her mother's parenting that she may not like, however, in the end she seems to resolve by implying her mother is nicer than she is mean. Child T on the other hand, spoke of his mother as an ally, implying trust and acceptance within their relationship, his mother being someone who really knows him and believes him when it counts: "yeah, I told her, even though I didn't say the word she still believed me. Cause I actually didn't say the word" (i.e. in reference to getting in trouble at school for using inappropriate language, and his mother believing that he

did not say such things). He later goes on to discuss certain differences in terms of what is acceptable at home versus at school (i.e. using certain language, and letting out anger in a destructive manner). “I got angry [Do you remember what you got angry about?] I dunno, probably my sister [Does that happen at school ever?] No only at home. Because if I punch a wall at school, oops.” This discussion also brought attention to the fact that children are aware of the differences between home and school and that these differences may sometimes be challenging to navigate. Although Child R did not speak of his mother much, if at all, he included her in his scrapbook with little messages that seemed to signify that she is an important character in his life.

Fathers were not as commonly included in children’s photo elicited storytelling, and seemed to be presented as a more complicated relationship (such as with Child T, Child E, Child H, Child L, and Child W). Child E’s mention of her father was in relation to him being late coming to pick her up from school. Child T brings up how his father has struggled with abusive drinking, and Child H speaks of how he can no longer see his stepdad since he has moved back to South Africa. It seems as though Child T may have some animosity towards his father, as he says his dad will not be receiving a father’s day gift, and how his parents are divorced and he’d prefer to continue living with his mother.

Oh my father, he used to be, he doesn't drink beer anymore. But, i'm still divo- my mother's still divorced, it's not like he'll come back or anything. I'm going to my dad this weekend for Saturday and Sunday. I'd rather live with my mother. That's why when anybody does Father- Happy Father's Day gifts I don't give it to him.

Child T also speaks of having to visit his father in order to see his cousins, “Ya but you see [your cousins] every time probably, I don't. I have to visit my father to see them,” implying that visiting his father is not a sought after activity and acts as a barrier to other family members. Although Child L does not give any details about his father, he is the only family member included in his scrapbook. Both teachers and the T-team bring up the issue of Child L longing for his father’s attention. The only one who doesn’t really mention any detail when bringing up her father is Child W.

Interestingly, although a few of the children also mentioned showing other family members, such as cousins (Child T) and their grandmother (Child E), the topic of siblings did not arise often. Almost every child in the study has a least one sibling, but siblings were seldom spoken about. Child E briefly speaks about her brother and how he bugs her and Child T mentions his sister and what happens if he uses her things, “I can't, because Child W is using it so if I break it, she'll get mad. Cause then she'll blame me, if it wasn't me, and then maybe she'll

say 'yes it was' and all that stuff." Child R also put a picture of one of his younger sisters in his scrapbook in his family page and spoke quite highly of them during the photo exhibition. Although he did not speak much about his family while at school, he did mention his lizard, and how excited he was to be able to take a camera home to photograph his lizard. It is curious that when Child W mentions her brother it is within a school related context as opposed to at home. She speaks of him as bothersome, but also as her council when witnessing another child's injustice.

My brother thinks, last year my brother, umm you know Person X at daycare she says to Peer Z she's putting him on the bad list and when he's like handicapped you know so she makes him cry and then I tell my brother and then my brother says make sure she never does that again. And umm that's what bothers me. And there's Peer Y last year, last year when umm when Peer Y pushed me and started kicking me. My brother stands up and says stop it Peer Y. He didn't he kept on doing that and didn't and he told the principal and he got a yellow slip and a green slip.

She is protective of him, stating that no one should be calling her brother names, "...that's really racist to my brother. It means something really rude." However, she also says that they do not play together at home.

Other details of home mentioned by Child H and Child O throughout the process of the project seem more specifically related to personal experiences. Child O describes a story about a creepy doll that moves by itself, or is possibly activated by movies on TV, "It's a doll that looks like Chucky and moves around with a plastic sword, like and it walks for some reason, like sometimes...I looked there's no battery and it can move." This seems to be very similar to the storyline of Chucky, the movie. He mentions having watched it when he was a baby and that's when things had started. "I was a baby I was watching Chucky too that's when everything broke..." He then goes on to explain how, not knowing that it was the doll causing all the creepy things to happen, he tried to take it with him. However, the doll did not come with him. The creepy happenings only seemed to have occurred at his mom's house (which happens to be the home he was removed from): "For some reason when I tried bringing it with me because I did not know it done all that, it wanted to leave [Oh, so it stayed at the house?] Ya when at my mom's place."

Child H one of the few children that make reference to age, and particularly the age of his mother. At first he broaches the topic wondering if he should be playing a game that is designated for children 8 years old and up, possibly wondering about the appropriateness of the game for his age. Another instance of age comes up after he says, "I suck. Become of my mom,



because of my mom.” He later brings up how old his parents are, and specifically how old he will be when his mother reaches a certain age. With the understanding that Child H is a highly perceptive and intelligent child (Teachers, Focus groups), it may be possible that he is aware of a negative stereotype around young mothers.

Interestingly, Child L was the only child who did not mention his home life or associate any of the photos or videos he had taken to anyone related to his family or home. In fact, it almost seemed to go as far as avoiding any mention of family and/or home. With many of the adults around him concerned with the multiple challenges in his home environment he may have very well used this project as a way to shift focus away from his home for a short while. With one-on-one attention, and autonomy within the project, Child L may have taken refuge from the home factors he seemed to be faced with in other school contexts. With so many of the teachers praising his stop-motion videos during the exhibition, it seemed to be a good opportunity to reinforce his strengths and skills and stay focused on him.

**School Relationships.** Many common threads about school were found weaved through the stories of each child. These patterns contribute to our understanding of the existing perspectives and school experiences held by these seven children. When thinking of relationships, there were four patterns that seemed to emerge. For one thing, children seemed to mention and include photos of adults in school representing different types of relationships they may have in school. Secondly, peers seem to be of importance for certain children, while others do not seem to have much mention of peer to peer interactions either in their storytelling and in their photographs. Thirdly, animals appeared in positive and comforting manners throughout many of the child narratives. Finally, the connections these children have to various spaces in the school are discussed. The following will explore these emerging patterns related to relationships in the school.

**Adults.** Spending such a large portion of their days in school, it seems fitting that adults in the school would be included in their photographs of what is important to them about their learning environments. Interestingly, homeroom teachers were not the only adults in the school that the children focused on for their photographs. It seems their homeroom teachers are associated with learning while others, such as the specialists, may be associated with special activities and/or needs outside the academic realm. The following will take a look at the different relationships mentioned with adults in the school.

Certain children, such as Child E, seemed to bring up their classroom teachers quite often, and in a positive manner, referring to them as people who teach her things and are part of her learning: “ya because she teached me stuff and I learn from her.” Child H also shares this

sentiment, referring to his teacher being someone he learns with. Child O also appears to have a positive relationship with his teachers. Child O seems to associate teachers in general with safe relationships and attributes his teachers to certain enjoyable academic activities such as reading and reflex math: “My teacher. [What do you like most about them and their teaching?] Yeah their teaching. And they're fun. [What kind of things do they do that's fun in class?] Reflex math. And projects and all that.”

On the contrary, teachers seem to feel as though they are playing such diverse roles, often times alluding to feeling inadequate as teachers, or not being able to spend enough time teaching curriculum.

As a professional you want to do your job. On paper a child in crisis or a child academically less capable let's say you want to have as many outlets for them as possible so they get the support from one level to the next so you'll put IEPs into place, you'll try everything, strategies, try to communicate with parents who don't respond, you try and help that child as much as possible and then within the school, like resources they should be having on a regular basis, they don't because of the demand, the crisis that we have...So you're just left with not being able to do your job in the end to reach this child. So you do reach them yes on a maternal level, but at the same time you know we're trained academically to bring to make these kids achieve socially, academically, and we feel we can't give them all of that. So something always gives

Although uncertain about the efficacy of their role given the multitude of responsibilities that are added to their plates, it seems the children in this project see a direct link between their teachers and their learning.

Homeroom teachers, although mentioned, were not at the forefront of all children's minds when speaking about their experiences with adults in school. Other children, such as Child T and Child L, did not speak about their homeroom teachers, but referred only to specialists outside their main classrooms when speaking about any adult relationships in a meaningful manner.

These specialists are presented in the children's photos and stories in quite a positive light and are sometimes related to children's socio-emotional needs. When brought up, it is within the context of an enjoyable activity: “My Hebrew teacher. And I like Hebrew...Yeah, and having fun and playing” (Child O), personalized attention: “...I would go out to the store and she would buy me stuff. No one else goes with her” (Child W), or of a special object found in the school: “It's a picture of a cool marble set and I'll tell them it's in Ms. X room (Child H).”

Specialists also appear to be associated with special projects in the school. Child W directs her attention to a quilt hung up in the hallway. It was a project done by a previous teacher's sister who helped with the quilting and was made up of patches that each child had contributed. Child W spoke about this quilt as something special made by this sister:

this is Miss CX, her umm her sister made it. All of this quilt. She sewed all of this, she made all the string. It was like a big boulder like full of string like that. She rounded it up. I know all of these people. Some I don't like. But they're they're the ones that did the things. This is mine.

Child O gives credit to the drama teacher for the school play he seems to derive belonging from: "...our drama teacher, that's who thought of Peter Pan." He also talks about how he enjoyed music lessons in the past, "I tried taking a picture of this one, the music teacher...Dee dee dee and then we got to play the guitars." Other adults in the school, such as the janitor, were also recognized by the students as an important figure in the school. Although Child L does not talk about the janitor, he takes the time to create a stop-motion video of a walk around the school, leading up to the janitor's door. Some of these photographs ended up being used for the janitor's retirement assembly, something Child L seemed to be happy about.

**Peers.** Peers were also mentioned throughout the project, in both positive and negative contexts. When mentioned in a positive manner, it appears as though peers may be a source of social belonging and a helping hand. Especially with Child E and Child O, the photos in their scrapbooks seem to bring out this idea that their peers are an important aspect of their school life. Child O talks about how good his peer is in the Peter Pan play, and how he has a crush on a girl in his class. He also invites some of the other children in the project to work alongside him during his photography and scrapbooking time. He appears to appreciate being around others. Child E mentions how she has to show her friend a photo of the upstairs room at school, "because last time I was telling her the story and, about me coming upstairs, and I wanna show her a little thing. That's why." There are also photos of her classmates' cubbies that she wanted to show them. Finally she invites one of her friends to join us in taking pictures around the school. Child T mentions wanting to show his videos to his friends, and this is the only time he really brings up his peers. Given the fact that his teachers have their concerns about him not having many friends, if any, it may be significant that he includes his peers as part of his audience for the videos he seems to be proud of. Child W talks about her peers in a useful and positive manner, both within the context of school, and outside of school. She mentions a peer in class that used to help her, saying "there was a purple frog and there and there was someone else umm who helped me...She was the one who helped me, I wasn't really good at stuff, she

helped me. She got that one sometimes for helping me.” She also talks about playing with her mother’s friend’s older daughter at home, “She’s going to another school next year so I won’t be able to see her. She’s older than me and I’m only 8. Last time she painted my nails.”

Peers are also sometimes mentioned in a negative sense, referring to a bothersome experience. This occurs when Child E took a photograph of the happy/sad drama faces and talks about one of her peers at school being bothersome when she visits him at home (Figure 10). She mentions this peer saying mean things to her and making her feel sad:

Because whenever I got to his house...Pretend this...I’m on the door, I’m in the door...I come in, and then as soon as I see him, he’s like “boooo” And he says mean things to me, and then he walks out and he says “bleah”, and then he closes the door...I think I took a picture of how I feel maybe, yeah...Oh here. That’s a picture of how I feel. I said to friend X, I feel sad. Yeah, that’s, that’s how I feel.



Figure 10. Child E drama faces

Child H also mentions his peers during his time taking pictures of what really bugs him. He talks about this peer as his “worst enemy” saying, “he bothers me a lot.” Given the possible pressures from home to make friends, this idea of peers being a source of social belonging may actually be seen as something bothersome. His use of humour, coupled with his aversion to share anything personally meaningful, does not always seem to work as a strategy for social

acceptance. Therefore, he may possibly have a negative association to his peers. Interestingly, Child W lists off many peers and friends in the context of what bothers her, however she does not give any further detail about why these peers are in fact bothersome to her.

**Animals.** There were also many mentions of animals. From posters of puppies, to storybook characters, and pets at home, animals seem to have received a lot of attention from the children in this project. Child T made many mentions of his love for farm animals, and hippopotamuses (“I like cows so I like building farms”) and Child O talks about how he likes the poster of puppies up in the behaviour technician’s room (“I love puppies! They’re so adorable!”, Figure 11).



Figure 11. Child O picture of puppies

Child E tells us about her favourite dog, “You know what my favourite kind of dog? A golden retriever. I’m gonna have that one when we move.” Child L does not say much about animals, but his whole scrapbook is full of photographs of his pets at home. With the T-team commenting on the pets at home representing the relationships carrying unconditional acceptance for Child L, pets may be a source of comfort for certain children. Child R talks about how important his lizard is, and includes photographs of her in his scrapbook also (“Yap, I want to take pictures of LZ”). Child W talks about her cats as someone she wants to bring a photo home for, “And I want to bring that one. A picture of me to bring to my mom to show to my cat.”

A photograph of her cat is also one of the few photographs she includes in her scrapbook. Given the fact that animals are always brought up in a positive context, there may be a sense of comfort found with animals and pets, something that the children may be noticing around the school and at home.

**School Spaces.** School spaces is included under the broader theme of school relationship because it seems children define spaces through the interactions that occur and/or the needs that are met within that space. Some of the emerging patterns from photos around spaces in the school are particular to the ideas of the week given during photo taking, while others arise outside of these ideas. The themes around space were not mutually exclusive for each space. In fact, it seems as though certain spaces, or even subsections of a space, may have even been attributed multiple roles. Emerging definitions of space included spaces for play and learning, safe spaces, and observational accounts of the hallway space.

*Spaces for Play and Learning.* Although references to the classroom were made as a place for learning, “My class, everything I learn is in the class. That's all I have to say the class is. That's the class” (Child R), it was not the only space where children are aware that learning is taking place. Rooms such as the library, the gym, the drama room, outside, and the daycare rooms were all brought up in a context of learning. Child W and Child E both bring up the library, focusing on stories and books as a form of discovery. Child R talks about the gym being a place where he learns about health and helping others, “Ooouhhh ya the gym. It's really like you're learning about, you're learning about all these things and you're helping, you keep your health up and stuff.” He also talks about drama being something useful to learn for high school:

Drama room you learn how to act, you learn how to not, like start to like freeze in front of a live audience. Cause if you go to high school and you go into and you get a lead play, if you get to lead play a play, you'll learn, you'll know not to laugh onset. [How does this picture make you feel?] Makes me feel alive with passion

There is also mention of learning outside of the school context. Much of what Child W brought up possibly pointed to the idea of learning from experiences both within and outside the school context. She brings up places that she has been and others that she would like to go to. When in the library, she pulled a book out about Egypt (Figure 12), linking it to a movie she had watched at home describing her interest in wanting to visit this place and see the interesting symbols she sees in the book. She says,

I like Egypt and I wanna be, go to Egypt but I never seen a symbol like this and it's cool. That's why I took a picture of it. Cause I wanna see the triangles and that, and the pyramids, and all of that, to discover stuff.



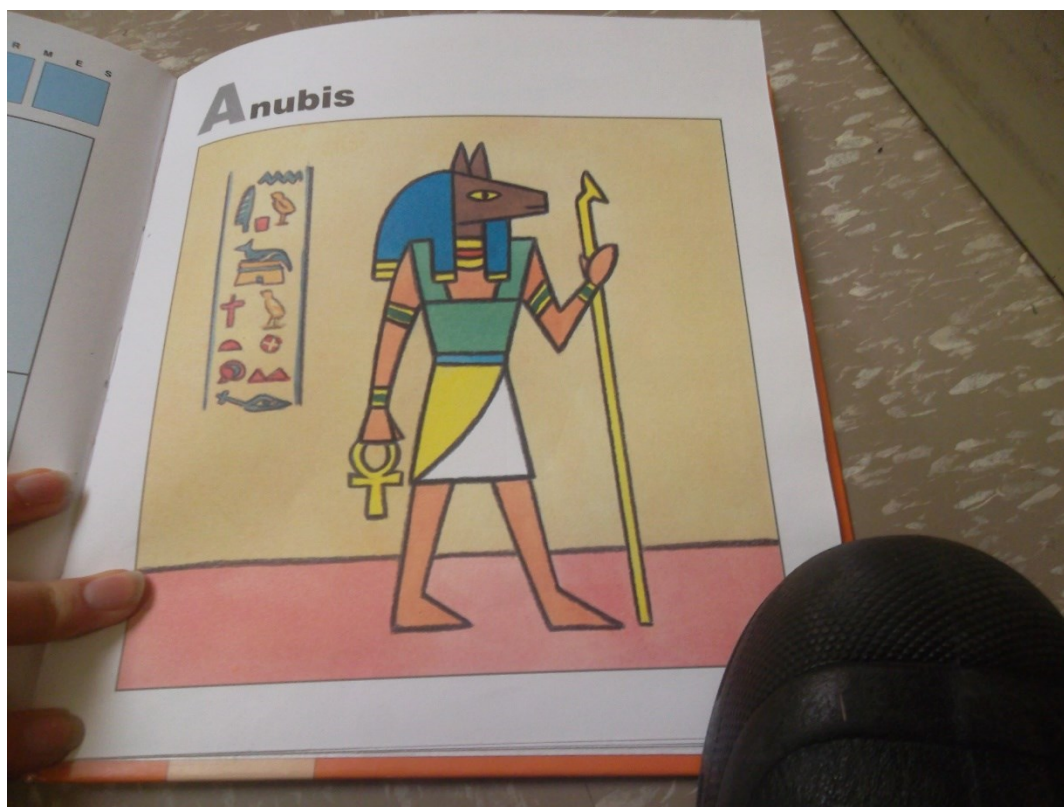


Figure 12. Child W library book about Egypt

There is a lot of play outside during Child W's photo sessions where she seems to get excited when finding things in the puddles on the playground. Her visit to the Biodome is brought up in a memorable manner and a desire to go see the Alice in Wonderland play is expressed (albeit with a hint of disappointment as she expresses, "it's a lot of money to go there"). All these instances may point to a more hands on approach to learning, where learning is not only sought after within the school, but outside as well.

Furthermore, children drew the link between play and learning, recognizing that certain spaces are important because you can learn through play. Child E seems to attribute her play at daycare with learning, mentioning play with puzzles, saying "because when you when you play with toys sometimes you learn some things." Child R points to his play with foosball, the computer, and even mentions watching TV as learning tools found around the school. Child O mentions how much he likes video and computer games, pointing to the fact that they are hard to win, but still fun to do and "because it's fun and you're free." This attitude towards challenge seems to also come through when he talks about homework assignments, Hebrew classes he takes after school, and group projects in school: "Yeah, reading is fun."

Certain spaces mentioned also seemed to be linked to particular people that help them learn. For instance, Child R comments on a photograph he took of his classroom door, including

mention of his teacher, and stating that this is where he learns everything. Child H takes a photo of a room upstairs in the school, “I just want to take a picture of that because it's where I learn and stuff...Just with me and my teacher.” Child W talks about the gym, the setting for her afterschool hip hop dancing led by one of the educators who she seems to feel a positive affiliation to: “I like it and Miss X cause I like it, she's nice. Umm I do art, I do hip hop, I do I do lots of stuff with her.”

Interestingly, learning spaces were also not always focused on as such. When Child E brings up her classroom and the school in general, she also focuses on the windows, saying, “Because whenever we're doing homework, if we're really tired. Actually this is something I like. Cause whenever you feel tired and teachers teach you, you close your eyes and then dream about.” Child W spoke positively of the fact that in her French class and the resource room she gets stuff, like candy, or access to toys:

[The resource room]. They help kids and I go there too. Yeah do their homework and that. So this is my room...I get to play on computer and she gives me candy. She told me today to come back at the end of the room today to get one of her gummies, but she was gone. Is this is where she gives stickers. And this is where her desk is here at the bottom. That's where she gives me candy.

It seems as though these children may also be drawing attention the aspects of their environment that helps them get through the day, or that they may possibly look forward to.

In sum, it is interesting to note that children tend to bring up many spaces outside their main classrooms in reference to learning. Children seem to also highlight different forms of learning while talking about space.

*Safe Space.* The idea of space creating a sense of comfort and security is something that each child tended to interpret differently. Some children stuck to photographing actual spaces in the school, while others thought of activities they enjoyed, or people they felt comfortable with. Some children did not explicitly mention feelings of safety but instead spoke about things they liked. In all cases, it seems as though the spaces mentioned are places that these children may be going to get different needs met. The following will take a look at the various understandings of safe space within the school.

Certain children, such as Child L and Child W do not explicitly mention any places that they feel safe, however, there may be certain spaces that they potentially feel more of an affiliation to, or a sense of belonging. Child W mentions many places in and around the school, however there are only two that she describes positively, the resource room, and her French class, even going as far as labeling the resource room as “my room.” She goes on to say the



resource room is where, “They help kids and I go there too. Ya do their homework and that.” She may have a stronger connection to these spaces, possibly due to the fact that she is getting support in a manner she is receptive to. Child L also seemed to gravitate towards particular spaces, one of which is the gym. Child L talks about the gym as a nice place, somewhere where he can play sports, ping-pong, and a space he also seems to associate to the gym teacher. He draws attention specifically to the motivational (Figure 13) and anti-bullying posters on the walls, saying, “there's no bullying allowed. Don't laugh at me. It says don't laugh at me. And don't laugh. Unless you do something funny.” The other posters refer to failure only being defined as failure if you didn't learn from it. Child R also points to the gym as a safe place saying, “I just feel safe there...”

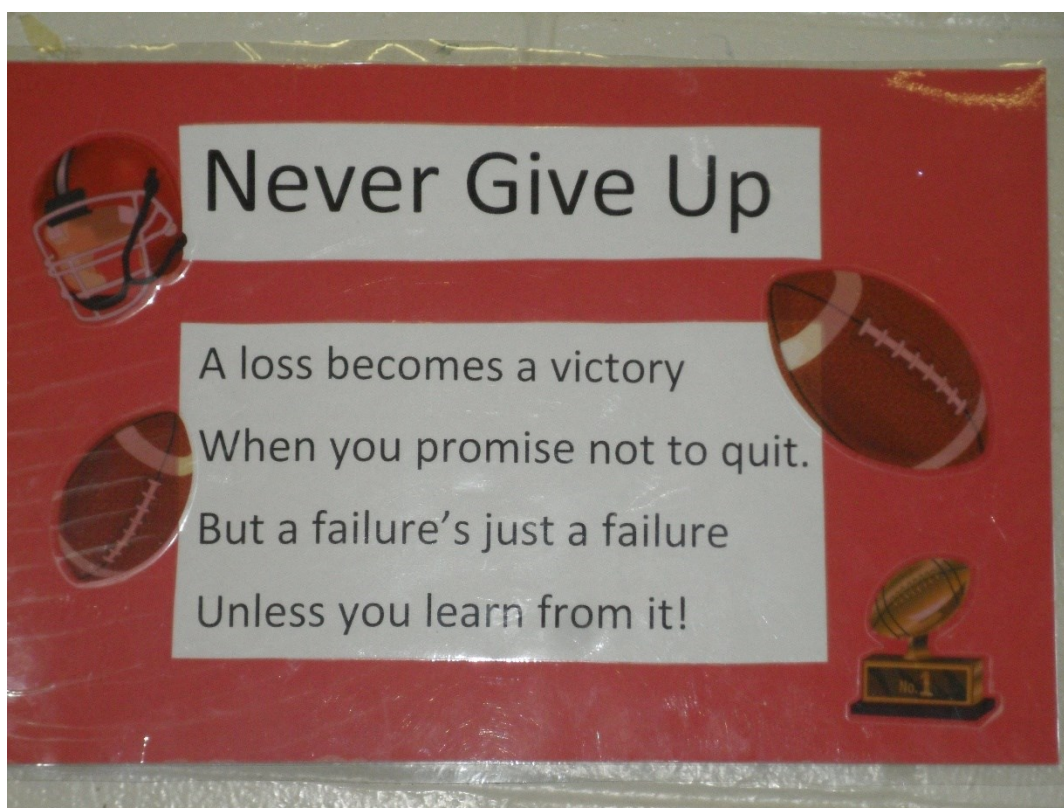


Figure 13. Child L motivational poster found in the gym

Certain spaces seem to elicit positive emotions, even a sense of pride. Child L also mentions how he thinks it's a good thing that the school has computers, an activity he enjoys. Child H points to the lost and found as a place that also makes him feel good: “The lost and found. It makes me feel good because sometimes I find my things makes me feel proud cause I'm actually like coming here and stuff.” At some point in the project, each child had drawn attention to something that was hanging on the walls in the hallways. Hallways are a kind of in-between space, however some children, such as Child E, Child W, and Child H, would

purposefully bring me to a place in the school where their art or work was put on display. Many pointed out posters that they enjoyed, or class projects that were interesting to them (like the bee and honey project that Child H spoke of). In any case, there seemed to be a recurring sense of pride, curiosity, and interest in what was hung up on the walls of the hallway. Child R verbalizes the importance of hallways, stating “Halls are important. Short cut. If, if you saw something happen you can just go to Miss X, or if you did something...just go and just like instead of having to walk around just like go through right there...”

Other children referred to spaces where they were able to fulfill a particular need. Both Child O and Child T bring forth the significance of food in school, and draw attention to the behaviour technician’s room as a place they can get food, and visit with people they may not always see: “I chose here because it’s fun and I see Miss X and I miss her, and this is my favourite place on Tuesdays when I come...eat lunch here...and everybody asks for cheese and bread” (Child O). Child T echoes a similar sentiment for the importance of the behaviour technician’s room, while also including the fact that he has access to toys in this room. On separate occasions Child O and Child T describe food as a necessity, with Child O saying, “it’s food, we need food to survive” and Child T explaining, “If me have no food, me die. Me always hungry.” It’s something that appears to be on their minds often, especially with Child O (often asking for snacks or talking about food during our sessions). Feeling as though there is food security at school may be an aspect of feeling safe for Child O and Child T. Even Child H presents a scenario where having a soda vending machine is important so that no one will die of thirst in the school:

It’s important because like umm you can get drinks with it and like if you don’t drink anything for 2 days you die so like if you’re near it for a long time you can actually drink instead of just like dying you can like, it’s safe because you can actually like get drinks and stuff.

Child R talks about feeling safe in the daycare room, and the office. Daycare is somewhere you can go to at lunch time, and the office is described as a place where everything happens, a place you can go to when in need of something:

The office, it is the place where everything happens. It’s where the announcements are made, it’s where you learn, like if you get hurt that’s where you go, or [daycare] if it’s lunch time. That’s it. Because if I get hurt I’ll just go, if it’s not lunch time, I’ll go there and I’ll get treated...

The foosball table (in the behaviour technician’s room) is something Child R refers to as a place he goes to hang out in, potentially eluding to a sense of comfort emerging when around others,

or maybe being around others in this particular room (Figure 14). He also talks about wanting to show others his videos so that they can better understand his view of the school:

Cause it shows all the places I feel good and the music is really good to go with it and basically I'm just showing people where I feel safe in the school so like really just like a point of view of me.



Figure 14. Child R foosball table

Child R also brings up this idea of a space that is his own, and the good and bad that comes with it. He mentions his cubby as one of his hang out spots saying, “There's so many people there that I want people to know about my cubby, that's the thing that...My cubby is where I hang out.” There seems to be a bothersome element to his cubby as well, “My cubby bothers me, bugs me cause it's like all this room and I only have like a backpack and...it was too big and I had too little of stuff, and I would to have more stuff to put in my cubby” possibly indicating that Child R is comparing what he owns to what he would like to own. Knowing Child R had to leave his previous school, it may be that he feels a sense of belonging in this school that he did not feel in his previous school.

Child H responded to this idea of the week in a very particular manner. The majority of what he focuses on revolves around objects he can hide behind so that no one will be able to see him. However, some of the hiding places he refers to are not necessarily realistic options: “a coffee, coffee thing. Because you can hop in the bottle if it's big and you can close the cap and nobody will see you...” Another object in the drama room is described as ugly but is still seen as

holding a useful function: “that’s such an ugly picture. It’s ugly but it makes me feel good inside. You can have this really good reaction. Like you can be really sad and freak out and you can go right under it” (Child H). It is interesting to note that the objects he points to are found in the drama room, the behaviour technician’s room, and in the upstairs staffroom, but not in his classroom or daycare room, which are places he spends much of his time in. In fact, the places he points to are place he visits less frequently, needs special permission to visit, or has more individual attention in.

Overall, these children seem to be aware of the resources they can access in their environment for the various needs that they may be experiencing. Whether it be a place they feel comfortable receiving academic guidance, a space for them to play without judgement, or somewhere to go to enjoy some food and company, these children appear to interpret their environment holding the resources that may be necessary to get through the day.

**The Undesirable Side of School.** The following describes what came about from the more negatively charged ideas of the week that the children explored through their picture taking: ‘places that I don’t feel safe’, and ‘things that really bug me’.

**Not Safe.** When asked to explore any places they do not feel safe, most children ended up choosing something else to take photos of, telling us there were no spaces where they felt unsafe. In fact, Child O even said, “I feel safe everywhere here and with these teachers.” Although that may have been the case for some, other children reveal details about certain discomforts. For example, Child T says the only thing that would make him feel unsafe is being in a room outside all by himself:

Because I actually literally have nowhere that I don’t feel safe. The only place that would be, is like let’s say I’m outside and I’m in a room with there’s like no one really...And there was no one in there, that’s something I wouldn’t like...but since there isn’t something like that there there’s no point.

Child W points to being outside as bothersome, however she is also frequently requesting to do our sessions outdoors. If we look at when children tend to go outside, it is during recess, and lunch, a time filled with peer interactions. Given the fact that she also mentions seeing some of her peers as bothersome, it may be that being outside is bothersome given the social context it happens in.

Finally, Child H, once again, interprets this idea of feeling safe/unsafe in a particular manner. He described scenarios where objects at school would become dangerous given something going wrong. For example, “Because you have to skip and you can crack your head open” or “Because the screws might get loose and might fall and like the board might fall on

your head. If you're under the board trying to teach a class how to like unscrew the thing it might fall on you." He also mentions a scenario where,

Because maybe the whole tower can fall and like maybe the whole thing can fall on your toes and like maybe if you're ducking and you're like trying to go under the table but while you're walking to go under the table it might fall on your head. Like if you're ducking while walking, it might fall on your head

He seemed to be looking for what could potentially be unsafe in the school. When asked about whether or not these things are worrisome, he replies "Something that I just know. I don't worry about it because it never will happen but just in case." He also mentions unsafe scenarios outside of school, such as hockey pucks flying during a hockey game at his dad's place that could hit you in the head, as well as summer time and the risk of mosquito bites. Although these things seem more likely to happen, they still appear to follow the same patterns of what he dubs unsafe at school.

**Bugs Me.** Although many, if not most, of the children claimed that "there's not that much things that bother me" (Child R), instances of things that bug them were still brought up throughout the project. Two overarching patterns came out of their stories: issues with relationships, and issues with their surroundings.

*Issues with Relationships.* Throughout the process of this project, children mentioned negative interactions with their teachers, specialists, and peers. These interactions seem to revolve around ideas of fairness or justice. Children also seemed to have self-reflective moments where they reveal certain details about themselves that are somewhat bothersome to them. An exploration of these themes reveal further details.

Firstly, it appears as though there may be a link between certain bothersome acts and concepts of fairness and justice. Child E, Child H, and Child W all comment on bothersome interactions with peers, teachers, or parents. Child E talks about her mother being harsh and peers being mean to her, Child H refers to one of his peers as his "worst enemy", and Child W brings up situations where her peers have said inappropriate things, pushed her, or have gotten her into trouble. This seems to be quite present in many of the previously mentioned stories by Child W, including when she spoke about standing up against a boy with a handicap being put on the bad list, feeling upset about someone saying inappropriate comments to her brother, and pointing out that her brother stood up for her when she was being pushed around. In reference to her teachers, Child W mentions instances where she seemed to feel singled out, where she got in trouble, feeling accused of something she did not do. She talks about getting called out for things that all the other students are doing too, "And things tell on me for doing nothing. They

tell on me cause I'm just sitting there and doing nothing and everyone else is doing the same thing too, they tell on me.” She also points out that, “They say things that like I don't do. Well I do the right thing and sometimes they think I do the wrong things but I don't.” Furthermore, Child W makes reference to the idea of unwanted attention, recalling a time where she is telling one of the teachers to “please stop following me”. It sounded like she may have wanted to be alone for a moment, but the teacher was telling her to go to the office. In this situation, Child W describes feeling embarrassed to go back to class, not wanting to face her peers after the whole situation:

You know the part when I cried and that. And then Miss X comes she brings me to the office, she gets this paper from the book, yellow slip and then she comes to tell on whatever her name is to come out in the hall to talk to me. I start crying and saying that she's the opposite what I said. And then when she said you have to come in the room. I'm like no I don't want to I don't want to be embarrassed. Everyone going to ask me what happened and then I'm going to tell them...

Another interesting pattern includes children bringing up details about themselves that may be bothersome to them. Child O pointed to his ADHD stating that it makes it hard to focus and remember things. He talks about needing resources to help him and explains,

Because I have ADHD and things that bother me...Cause that you head goes more quicker and it's hard to focus and yeah...And they will forget some stuff....Like portal...Oh something that, let's say you forgot your password, I always use my portal. And now I can't go on to see what's my password.

Child H talked about his dry hands and how it bugs him sometimes.

*Issues with Surroundings.* Conversation around everyday activities such as putting on snow pants and having snow get in the way of playing on the jungle gym (Child E), not liking schoolwork (Child E), having to buzz to get into the school (Child R), and too much repetition in gym class (Child R) seem to represent the little annoyances of their everyday school experience.

Other children focus on issues they have with certain items found in the school, such as a poster of a dog on the wall (“the dog looks weird and it annoys me...”, Child H), having few things to fill his cubby (Child R), being bothered by a pan on the stove that is nice that he cannot have (“...because it looked nice and they bug me. Because they look nice and I want them”, Child H), video games that are too hard to win (Child O) and a photograph that is felt to portray an unfavourable image (Child R).

## **Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This participatory action research project sought to explore how students with EBD perceive their learning environments. Through photo-elicited interviews, we were able to capture the perspectives of each child pertaining to what is important about school, their likes and dislikes, and where they feel safe and unsafe. Each of the five weeks of picture taking in the school was guided by a broad theme to get them thinking about their learning environment. The emerging themes that came from this data reflect these broad picture taking ideas, but also go beyond them, revealing a compilation of unique patterns from each child.

Secondly, we sought to understand how these children are being perceived as learners. With focus group discussions both prior to and after the project had ended, we were able to obtain a more detailed understanding of these children and their school environments. Overall, what has been revealed leads to a discussion about the importance of home school collaborations, as well as school engagement and the importance of the child perspective. Further discussion on the influence of this methodology on school engagement and resiliency is also included.

### **Home and School Partnerships**

As has been shown in the literature (Baker, 1998; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hill & Taylor, 2010; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009), and expressed in this project's focus groups, family school collaboration is quite effective for school engagement and success, however it is also quite difficult to achieve with all families. Teachers in this school mention time and time again the importance of having parents involved in their children's schooling and the noticeable impact it has on the child's progress (such as with Child L and Child W):

Ideally I think that's what every teacher wants to have that support. It really takes that support the parent working at home, they're teachers too. They need to help us to make their child grow, like develop. We should be working in conjunction which is not always the case but it's so important. (Teachers, Focus groups)

As is also pointed out, higher levels of family involvement are associated with higher rates of student success (Abenavoli, Greenber, & Bierman, 2015; El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). However, many teachers seemed to feel discouraged when discussing the level of parent participation ("...I've been trying to meet with parents - We've had a lot of unsuccessful, that's part of the frustrations"). They expressed the many challenges they face when trying to connect to the families at home ranging from parents dealing with other stressors, to an unwillingness to collaborate. With this in



mind, it is not hard to fathom a gap between the school and the home, and how difficult it must be to work alongside one another when there may possibly be a separate set of priorities for each party (or even a perceived difference in priorities).

Upon discussing this topic of home school collaboration, previous studies are focused on parent and teacher perspectives, omitting the voice of the child. Interestingly according to the children's perspectives, there seems to be a desire to connect home and school and share their lives in both realms, albeit in different ways. And they seem to be doing it, regardless of adult awareness.

**Children as Bridges.** As active agents in both home and school, children are the bridge between contexts. With most of the children in this study electing to share their photographs with members of their family, it seems to be important for their school lives to be acknowledged at home. With teachers bringing up many of the challenges endured with these children and their families, it is interesting to note that these are not the same factors that are chosen by the children to be shared between home and school. In fact, it seems as though there is much more of an emphasis on sharing the positive elements of school, highlighting both what is of interest to themselves and possibly what would be of interest to their mothers. This pattern may be alluding to having their primary caregiver interested in what they are doing in school. Having children bring home positive and relatable elements of school may help contribute to a line of communication between home and school.

On the flip side, certain children also shared elements of their home lives at school. Whether it be through a classroom activity (i.e., drawing family members, Child E) or reminiscing about family after seeing something relevant in the hallway (i.e. South African flag, Child H) there seems to be opportunities to think about family all over the school. In contrast to how they decided to share their school lives, sharing their home lives did not necessarily always include positive experiences. While certain children highlighted supportive and positive relationships at home (such as with Child R), others seemed willing to divulge details that gave the impression that home may be complicated. This coincides with higher levels of stress in the home for children with emotional and behaviour difficulties, and the need for intervention to include support for families (Fox, Dunlap, & Powell, 2002). Given the fact that this school had the T-team intervention services, emphasizing the importance of supporting environments, it may be that these children had a space to release certain uncomfortable details. Interestingly, there were other children, such as Child L, Child O, and Child W who seemed to stray away from revealing details about their family and home life, possibly signaling a need to shift their focus away from home during their school days.



In either case, children seem to be communicating about a level of home and school involvement that continues to include respect for their need for autonomy and their role as the primary focus between home and school.

### **School Engagement and the Child Perspective**

According to research, school engagement is a resiliency factor, one that guards against negative future outcome and contributes to success (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Baker, Derrer, Davis, Dinklage-Travis, & Linder, 2001; Boyle & Lipman, 2002; Covell, 2009; Gamoran, 1992; Malindi & Machenjedge, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Willms, 1999; Wolfe & Mash, 2006). Given the fact that we define engagement as a behavioural, cognitive, and emotional process (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009), understanding the areas in which children excel and/or struggle would be crucial for the continued support and development of their school success. As every child holds a multitude of strengths and limitations, levels of engagement affecting success can be different for each child.

Looking at Ungar's (2011) work, it is interesting to note that he defines resiliency as a combination of environmental and individual factors, stating that,

in the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.

(www.resilienceproject.org)

By setting up a platform to access the child perspective, we can better understand how children with EBD perceive their learning in school, the resources they gravitate to, and the challenges they may be facing in relation to learning and engagement. Inclusive education equates to facilitating learning for all students (Ministère de l'Éducation, 1999) therefore, having access to the child perspectives can assist in strengthening our learning environments and move this goal forward.

**Behavioural Engagement.** This area of engagement is defined by overt behaviours exemplifying participation in classroom activities and tasks (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009). After working with these children, and noticing how little they speak of their main classrooms and academic subjects, there may be an issue with the way we are searching for behavioral engagement. Staying inside the classroom may be limiting our understanding of how children engage with their learning environments as a whole. In this project, children spoke highly of many of their learning opportunities, including the resource room to get help with homework (Child W), the drama room as useful for high school (Child R), the library as a source

of discovery through books (Child W and Child E), the gym as a place for sport (Child L), as well as many others. Other opportunities for involvement were met with what seemed to be excitement and a display of effort to prioritize their school commitments, such as being part of the Peter Pan play, or even attending the homework club (Child O).

Overall, children with EBD may actually be spending a larger percentage of their time outside the classroom than some of their peers. Based on observational accounts of these seven children, this was definitely the case. Therefore, we need to be thinking about engagement as a variable beyond the classroom.

**Cognitive Engagement.** This leads into a discussion about cognitive engagement. As Bandura had introduced, the opinions we have of ourselves and how capable we perceive ourselves to be, holds the power to shape the way we interact with our environment (Bouffard, Boisvert, & Vezeau, 2003; Fleury-Roy & Bouffard, 2006; Phillips, 1984). Certain children in this project made decisions based on the perception that things will not work out (Child L) while others felt as though they were the best at something (the best builder, Child T). For Child L there seemed to be this hesitation to invest in his own ideas, possibly pointing to lower levels of self-efficacy, and in turn more of a struggle with cognitive engagement. His teachers also mention his difficulty with motivation and sticking to a task until completion (Teachers, Focus groups). It is therefore interesting that he seemed engaged and willing to complete his video projects during the photography project. It may be that the level of control he had throughout the project, coupled with the fact that the project was meant to be a fun activity helped with his level of engagement.

This idea of learning taking place through an enjoyable activity or project, seems to be reflected in instances of learning outside the classroom. While talking about their photographs, children bring up learning, pointing to building with legos (Child T), play at daycare (Child E), the resource room for homework support (Child W), as well as mentions of computers (Child R, Child L, and Child O), drama class (Child R), the library (Child W), and the gym (Child L). As Wholwend and Peppler (2015) state, play can deepen learning, and contribute to heightened motivation for the activity at hand. Wu (2015) also found benefits with German students learning through play, however, results were not as strong for Chinese students. Children's cultural understandings of learning hold an influential role in the way information is retained. Therefore, it is important to note that the children in this study seem to attribute learning in a positive manner when it is in the context of an enjoyable activity.

Learning outside the classroom may also relieve some of the evaluative pressures that may be felt with academic tasks. Poorthuis et al. (2015) reveal lower levels of school

engagement in students who have received poor report cards, pointing to an association between evaluation and engagement. Considering children with EBD tend to struggle academically, it may be easier to engage with learning outside of a directly evaluative context.

On the other hand, there is mention of a particular classroom being crucial to one child's learning (Child R). Interestingly, this is a closed classroom for students who are struggling academically. It is a place where this same child made mention of how happy he was to be there because it is something that is helpful to his learning (T-team, focus groups). It would be interesting to explore the environmental factors in this classroom that seems to be associated with positive perceptions of learning.

In this school, not only do these children point to different avenues for learning, it seems the adults in the school have a strong willingness to adapt to their needs. An illustrative example being Child T building something in the resource room while doing his multiplication tables (Specialists, focus groups). He may be having a hard time with self-regulated learning, however his resource teacher has come up with a strategy to help him with his work. Overall, these children seem to be communicating the importance of acknowledging different learning styles and contexts.

**Emotional Engagement.** Interestingly, given how these students have highlighted the value of their relationships at school, it seems as though they are associating learning not through curriculum, but through their social interactions and the secure bonds made at school.

Although there was mention in the focus groups of the perceived importance of fulfilling socio-emotional needs in order for children to be ready to learn, there were also concerns expressed around not being able to focus on their main mandate of teaching curriculum. The fact that the children seemed to associate teachers to learning tools, may actually be pointing to the necessity for teachers to continue considering the needs that fall outside the realm of academics in order to fulfill their role as educators. Furthermore, children also brought up the many other adults in school in the context of various roles and needs. Whether it be one-on-one attention, basic needs, comfort and support, or special projects, children seem to enjoy having multiple relationships to meet their needs at school. In fact, on a broader level, this data would suggest that providing further support to school teachers and staff may help foster a more resilient environment. Broomhead (2015) has found that teachers tend to take on extra responsibilities with their students with EBD as a form of compensation for perceived parenting limitations. However, she also acknowledges the need for additional support in the form of training and support staff in order for educators to continue taking on these socio-emotional

responsibilities. Recognizing the value in strong relationships and socio-emotional needs within a learning context also requires further support for its sustainability.

With an understanding that relationships are viewed as an essential aspect of their school life, it does not mean that there are no challenges present. There seems to be this duality in the presentation of school relationships. On the one hand, they are spoken about as though they are something positive and essential to the everyday well-being of every individual (“we need people to live” Child O). On the other hand, there are avenues of relationships that may be difficult to manage, such as feeling misunderstood by your teachers (Child W), or wronged by a peer (Child E). As is typical of children with EBD, building and maintaining relationships (whether with adults or peers) can be a source of difficulty in school life (Cullinan, 2004). Although relationships have been identified as a positive resource in the school, certain children may be having a harder time accessing this resource in a way that creates feelings of social belonging attributed to school engagement (Al-Hendawi, 2012).

As children are describing their relationships and how they are related to the spaces in the school there seems to be this idea of defining space, describing each space in relation to its usefulness. The behaviour technician’s room is seen as a place with access to food and toys (Child T), a safe space (Child O), somewhere that seems to be void of any evaluative agenda. The gym is also identified as a safe space by certain children, discussing anti-bullying posters, and their enjoyment of the sports that are played (Child L). Others point to their cubby as a space to be alone (Child R), the resource room as a place they identify as their own (Child W), and the library, the resource room, and their classrooms as spaces for their learning (Child W and Child R). The children seem to know where to go depending on the need they may be trying to fulfill.

### **Methodological Reflections**

Much of the previous research on academic success supports the essential role of school engagement (Al-Hendawi, 2012; Baker, et al., 2001; Boyle & Lipman, 2002; Covell, 2009; Gamoran, 1992; Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009; Willms, 1999a; Wolfe & Mash, 2006), however, few studies have utilized an ecological/sociological approach to capturing student perspectives on this crucial element of school success (Langhout & Thomas, 2010). Allowing students to express their thoughts and emotions about their learning has shown to have a positive, empowering effect both for the students and the community (Clark, 2010; Kellett, 2010; Langhout & Thomas, 2010; Messiou, 2012; Palibroda, et al., 2009; Wang & Burris, 1997). Using PAR for this community-based project enabled a genuine team dynamic, creating a platform for

the community (students, teachers, and school staff) to also express their thoughts and opinions on the project and/or their school environment:

...you gave us some direction and some guidelines of how you wanted to do it, but then we really had a lot of input in what we wanted to see and how it was going to look like. And you were very very good at taking our input and taking our suggestions and applying it, and organized it so well..." (T-team, Focus groups)

Results have informed the community about the strengths and limitations children are experiencing. This information may have the potential to help the development of strategies to improve the student learning experience, which may positively influence long-term school completion and academic success. The following will discuss a few of the elements of this methodology that are important to consider, as well as some of the community reactions to the project.

**Interview Prompts and Ideas of the Week.** One of the advantages of this style of research is the priority given to process. This allows us to adapt the project to the needs of the participants and community. We were therefore able to identify issues early on in the project and try to find ways to improve them. These issues had to do with our child interview prompts, the other had to do with a couple of the broad picture taking themes we put forth to the children.

The prompts chosen for our interview were meant to be open-ended and broad so as to give room for the children to tell their stories. When implemented in this study, we noticed that the children learnt very quickly what questions to expect and did not seem willing to express much beyond the question asked. Upon review of the interview style, we decided to continue with the same prompts but change the way the interview was being conducted to a much more fluid and dynamic conversation. With this change, the interview prompts were no longer the focus of the interaction. Although there was less structure involved, children were freer to discuss as they wished. This openness to the interview created opportunities for much more riveting discussions of their photographs and experiences and may have contributed to the rapport being built.

Next, reflecting on the broad themes chosen for each week of picture taking, we noticed that the children did not react similarly to all themes. The two themes that focused on negative aspects of school ("Things that really bug you" and "Places you don't feel safe") seemed to be met with less response and interest. This is not to say that bothersome details of school were not shared, but they did not seem to be prompted as directly. Luckily, as the children are co-researchers in this project, they simply decided to take pictures an idea of their own.

**Researcher's Role.** The literature on participatory action research tends to highlight the importance of shared ownership of the project carried out with participants, and a sense of facilitated positive change for the community (Kellett, 2010; Messiou, 2012; Palibroda, Krieg, Murdock, & Havelock, 2009; Wang & Burris, 1997). However, there is not always much discussion on the role of the researcher or their experiences with the process. There is even less when trying to understand this methodology within the context of an elementary school setting. The following will outline a few of the essential components of this process in relation to the role of the researcher.

Firstly, developing relationships in the school was of utmost priority. By engaging myself in the school for five months prior to the beginning of the project, children and adults in the school alike began to get to know me. I began as a “helper” at the school, working closely with the behaviour technician and doing what was needed. By the end of the school year, I was being called the photography teacher. My role was flexible, adaptable to the needs of the community and defined through the process of building rapport.

Secondly, as has been stated previously, my role as an ‘authentic novice’ (Clark, 2010) opened the possibility for shared decision making and a co-constructed social realities. By maintaining a balance in the power dynamics between myself and the children, we were able to define our roles together and work as co-researchers. In order to do this, I needed to establish that the intentions of the project had less to do with what I wanted to know and more to do with what they wanted to tell me. By keeping this in mind, each child had a sense of autonomy in the project. Interestingly, the importance of creative control and autonomy later emerged as a theme when exploring how this tool was collaboratively defined and used. This coincides with levels of self-efficacy and its influence on school engagement (Bouffard, Boisvert, & Vezeau, 2003; Fleury-Roy & Bouffard, 2006; Phillips, 1984). Children’s perceptions of their ability to succeed influences the level at which they engage with a task (Bouffard, Boisvert, & Vezeau, 2003; Fleury-Roy & Bouffard, 2006; Phillips, 1984). Therefore, including them in a project focused on revealing and utilizing their strengths may have been a contributing factor for the success of the project. Furthermore as Covell (2009) states, a developmentally appropriate level of autonomy within learning can lead to increased school success. The emerging dynamics in this project may provide insight into factors that can elicit positive and meaningful learning experiences.

Next, a high degree of self-reflection was required throughout the process of this project. End of day debriefs with the research assistant, meetings with my supervisor, informal conversations with school staff, and field notes were all methods used to ensure both the quality

of the project and a balanced research dynamic were continued. Especially since my role as a researcher was more of a facilitative role for others' ideas to emerge, it was important for me to reflect on the process. In so doing, I could stick to the goals of the project while being flexible with the implementation of the project.

In sum, due to the fact that this project requires a high level of involvement from the researcher, it is important to make sure effort is being continuously put forth for reflection, support networks and a willingness for strong collaboration.

**Home Visits.** Although there was some hesitation towards the idea of visiting families, all participating parents and children welcomed me into their homes, and appeared to appreciate the visit. Other than expecting to talk about photographs, I had no agenda when visiting each of the homes which meant that the children and their families maintained control over what I was introduced to. Being associated with the school while still remaining a separate entity may have also created a legitimate but neutral role to begin making connections with families. Children were also taking home a photograph every week to show their families. This may have helped bring a level of familiarity with the project prior to the home visits. It would be interesting to further develop this aspect of the project.

**I-Click Community Reactions.** The school community had many comments on the process of this whole experience. One of the unexpected thoughts that came about at the end of this project, was the idea of I-Click photography club as a form of intervention. Although it was not intended to be anything of the sort, the strong collaborative bonds and platform for students to feel empowered through self-expression created a project that encouraged ownership, and reinforced positive attributions of the self.

The school community commented on their appreciation for a project that gave these children a chance to create something that was their own, to work on a project that can help raise their self-esteem, to accomplish something they can be proud of.

It was fantastic. It was a great event. I saw kids being very engaged in what they were doing, very proud of their work, excited to show it to everybody that came...it was really wonderful to see how open they were how proud they were of their work. And and and how they talked about each of their books was unique to them and it told a story, it told a really unique story to them, that...really helped me to understand them a little bit more and have a little glimpse of their home life which really changes sometimes your perception of who they are.

They talked about understanding the children a little more, about how positive it was for their families to have participated in the photo exhibition, and about how they valued the fact that these children had more one on one time and a chance to build relationships with us.

That's what I was thinking about for this project is these kids would have the opportunity to just have another place that they could feel they could express themselves and I think they had that opportunity so...if they could find someone they could feel safe with that there's things that they can talk about and discuss and that they can have that opportunity and so I think that they had that, that they bonded with you guys and made a relationship that was amazing and so for me it was all positive cause it's all about relationships for me.

Finally, they expressed their thoughts on this method being used as a communication tool, and about having the children involved in a project that is just for them, that they can feel good about:

...I loved it. And I think it was an amazing thing that the kids had an opportunity to sort of be able to express some of the things that were there in that book. I wish that we had someone to do it every year. - It also takes them away, it was something special, just for them, and they got to miss daycare. They got to be out of their routine for something special that focuses on them.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

**Scheduling Challenges.** There were several limitations for the current study, most of which revolved around scheduling. The children with emotional and behavioural difficulties at this elementary school are already taken out of class quite often for additional services and so running the photography session during the school day was not a possibility that the school community approved of. Photography sessions therefore needed to be scheduled after school hours, during day care time. This presented the limitation of not having a chance to take photographs during the day when all peers and staff are present. In order to work around this limitation, short lunch time sessions were set up once a week for each group so that the students had a chance to take pictures of activities and people that may not be around during daycare hours.

Other scheduling challenges revolved around school and family activity schedules and absences. Some of these students were involved in other activities after school, such as the homework program, or afterschool theatre rehearsals for the school play which disrupted the photo sessions. We coordinated with the teachers and school staff in order to come up with an appropriate time for these students to have their photo sessions and not have to miss their other



activities. One child in particular had an important family dinner once a week to go to. This would sometimes coincide with the photo session day. In these cases, we would just make sure to give this child a little bit more time the following project day so that they could still complete their photos and photo interviews. Finally, there were sometimes absences, due to sickness and/or other factors that happen to fall on the photo project days. In these cases we would try to give a little extra time to the student during the next project day.

Another limitation to the study involved lunch time sessions. Although these sessions were purposely set up to give a chance for the students to take photographs of people and activities during the school day, it also sometimes created issues of jealousy between other children not in the project. The researchers made sure to explain to any child who may have been upset by not taking photos that this was something done for the photography club. The participating students seemed happy to show the camera to their peers and were also willing to take their picture when requested. This also helped negotiate any jealousy that arose.

An additional challenging element of the lunch time session was the fact that certain students did not want to participate during lunch as it was their time to play with friends outside. When this was the case, we would simply ask if there were any photos they would like to take while they were outside or during the second half of their lunch when they were inside. If they said no, then that was perfectly fine and photography was just not done during that lunch hour. No other lunch hour was used as a replacement, mostly due to time constraints. However, if there were photos they wanted to take outside or during the second half, indoors, we would accompany them to take those photos and when they were done, they just stayed with their lunch group for the rest of their lunch hour.

**Scrapbook Challenges.** Finally, we also had to re-adjust the amount of time we dedicated to scrapbooking. We had originally budgeted two weeks for the children to be able to complete their scrapbooks. Given some of the above scheduling issues, as well as the fact that some children work faster than others, we had to extend this part of the project by an additional two weeks. This decision was made with the school community and so it was not a problem in the end.

An aspect of the scrapbooking that may have been cumbersome, and may have contributed to the length of time taken to complete their scrapbooks, was the sheer volume of photographs the children had to sort through when choosing which ones to put in their books. In future, I would suggest including a scrapbooking session every week for the duration of the project. Therefore we would have the picture-taking session divided into a picture taking part and a photo-interview part. That way, each child can choose their five favourite photographs

and talk about why they are important right after they have taken them. A second session can then occur later in the week, focused on putting those photographs into their scrapbooks. This also gives a chance for students to talk about their pictures more than once and can help the researcher better understand the students' narrative throughout the process.

Although these scheduling challenges arose, they were easily negotiated. All participating students expressed interest throughout the project and there continued to be a positive rapport with the students, their families, and the school staff.

**Researcher Bias.** As in any qualitative study, it is understood that subjectivity is part of research, and is something that needs to be identified to the best of your ability (Letts, Wilkins, Laws, Stewart, Bosch, & Westmorland, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Throughout this project, there were instances where my ideas may have been unintentionally favoured over those of the child. For example, during one of the sessions with Child L I caught myself encouraging him to replicate a stop-motion idea from a Youtube clip he showed me. After he showed me the clip, my intention was simply to take interest in what he was presenting and make it clear that this stop-motion idea is possible if he so wanted. Unfortunately, my goal to clearly communicate what I wanted for him overshadowed what he was already engaged with. It seems I was not paying attention to the fact that he showed no interest in creating this kind of stop-motion video, and what's more, he was already involved in the current video he was making. I found myself in a position where I was taking away creative control from him and turning the video project into a task. Luckily, this whole instance did not really go beyond this one conversation. Although I may have pushed him to consider the idea, I did not push him to do it.

However brief, these moments are crucial to reflect upon. Consistently writing field notes after every day spent at the school was essential for a highly self-reflexive process, helping to identify my influence within the dynamics of the project. Through this process, I was also able to continue balancing the power dynamics between the child and the researcher. This falls in line with the elements of qualitative research (i.e., credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) that lead to a highly reflexive process (Letts, et al., 2007).

**Future Research.** Conducting this PAR study utilized an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Langhout & Thomas, 2010). In other words, we attempted to access not just the child's perspective, but tried to understand the perspectives of others in the children's environments. With this in mind there are a couple of elements of this project that could be further developed. For one thing, a more in-depth exploration of the teacher narrative would provide details on the challenges and strategies used in this learning environment. It would be interesting to know what resources they feel are important for learning in the school, as well as

what they attribute as useful when in need of a support. During our focus groups, we also began to realize the sheer amount of information teachers and school staff were willing to share about their experiences. A few members remarked on how the discussions were almost cathartic (“phew release!”; “When’s our next session, we should do this again”). There seems to be a willingness to contribute to a project such as this, and therefore using this model may be of interest when trying to better understand the players in the environment of interest.

Secondly, future studies can focus on creating a platform in the home for both parents and children to take photographs and discuss their perceptions around what is important about learning. Using this methodology in the home may help to create a stronger voice for families as well as contribute to a more wholistic understanding of student life and learning. As part of the larger scope of this project, a home portion had been implemented. However, this aspect of the project was being piloted. Given the reactions from the children and their families, as well as the importance placed on the home-school connection by the children in this project, creating a stronger home portion using PAR holds the potential for positive intervention.

Although these elements were outside the scope of this project, they would provide a clearer view point into the lives of each child and could help to answer questions on how school engagement is shaped by the interaction between them and their environments.

Future studies could also implement this methodology in a high school setting to explore how students with EBD relate to their learning and social environments. Given how students with EBD tend to have a high drop-out rate (Kauffman, 2008; Ryan, Pierce, & Mooney, 2008), it would be interesting to understand how learning is defined, what is identified as challenging in their environments, and what resources if any, do they access. Comparing these narratives to the elementary school level may also reveal strengths and shortcomings of the education sector to support students and implement an inclusive model at multiple levels of student education. Results may help school communities support their students, and can inform educational policy.

### **Practical Implications**

This project contributes to the information on favourable conditions for a positive and resilient school environment, one that fosters school engagement for children with EBD. The following will discuss recommendations from the school community and the essential factors of this project that can be carried forward.

**Recommendations from the School Community.** During our focus group discussions, talk of this project being used as a dynamic family-school collaboration tool came about. Members remarked on this project, saying “it opened up the door to kind of the families trusting the schools.”

Using the non-evaluative and celebratory platform of the photo exhibition was suggested as a way to bring home and school together. In a sense, having parents and teachers in a room together for the purposes of being proud of their children may help all adults perceive each other as support agents for their children:

I would have liked if the viewing, if the way we could have seen it separately, the parents separately, but maybe overlapped it a bit with the parents...but this way they could see us differently as well. You know what I mean, like bring us all as opposed to separate entities, like home and school, I like it better

Others pointed to the fact that the children were inviting me into their homes as a way to share what they were proud of, and that this was happening because they were involved in a positive space with the project:

...we have to be more involved with the community and the community has to be more involved with us. Whichever way we do it - But you're not going to get any, a lot of parents just opening the doors. - You have to find a way, like you do it through food, you do it through care and all of that. The children were inviting in my opinion, they were inviting [the researcher] in because this was a whole other way to share, cause they were proud - But this is something we need to be focusing on if we want to be successful, if we want to reach these children and their families.

This idea of a non-threatening space to encourage participation and rapport between home and school also came forth in a suggestion to invite families into the school for something that does not revolve around academics:

It's interesting because it's not around academics right so they don't feel threatened right so they're not gonna get that they're kids not performing... Here we should have more open houses where kids get to show interesting things instead of around academics. They could be in the gym playing all the games that they do, you know, an art exhibition...

It seems the school community values home-school collaboration as an essential piece of children's school success. Therefore, this project seemed to highlight the utility of a neutral space for these bonds to flourish.

**I-Click Essentials.** Based on what the children have highlighted as important aspects of their school experience, the following will discuss three pieces of the project that can be adapted to other contexts. Whether it be replicating this study in other schools or brainstorming strategies for school engagement, the following essentials may help set up a solid foundation.

Being based in a safe and neutral space allowed this project to thrive and is part of what made relationship building with so many different members of the community possible. This is meant in both a physical space and a social, conceptual space. Working out of the behavioural technician's room, a place children seemed to seek out when in need of socio-emotional calmness or relief helped shape the identity and purpose of the study. Next, the neutrality of the researcher and collaborative goals of the project created more space for other voices to be heard. Therefore, the first I-Click essential would be establishing rapport in a non-evaluative space.

Referring back to the literature, it is important to recognize that there may be a communication gap at play influencing perceptions of the other when in an environment where working with others is key (Clark, 2010; Kellet, 2010). Being aware of this gap will help all players understand the value of sharing their voice through various means and listening to perspective. This project highlighted the positive influence of using photography to tell a story within a community. The second I-Click essential is the influence of communication and perspective.

Lastly, the children of this study brought forth the importance of ownership and the ability to be creative in their learning and activities. Being part of this photography club immersed them in an environment where they were in charge of their own creative process and were able to explore and capitalize on their strengths. It also provided a medium for each child to work through their challenging moments. The third the I-Click essential is therefore the importance of autonomy and the creative process.

Given the versatility of this project these three essential markers can be adapted into other activities within a school setting. Having these seven children involved and engaged in a project within the school that focused on their self-expression is something that I am proud to have been a part of. Setting up platforms for their voices to be heard brought about a positive reaction from the school and home communities and provided a chance for these children to involve themselves in something that was their own, that they can keep, remember, and feel good about.

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## Appendix A

### MEETING AGENDA

#### Overview of Participatory Action Research

Visual storytelling is a media method used in research to capture and share the realities of people within a community. It is an action research method, allowing those participating to take on a more empowering role in the research.

In order to gain a deep understanding of the students' perspectives of learning and school engagement, this action research project is focused on a philosophy of community partnership. This translates into the community having an active role in the research process. It is not research on a community, but with a community. Those involved act as co-researchers, helping us to explore the strengths and weaknesses that are seen as important to the individuals and their community.

Photography captures their realities in a medium that is easily shared to raise awareness on the issues and strengths of the community. The in-depth interviews about the photographs taken creates a narrative that drives attention to the perspectives of the community, what is important, and why. Altogether, this project's goal is to give a voice to the student's stories.

#### Project Considerations to Discuss:

- Themes
  - o In school:
    - What is really important to you in your life
    - Things that involve learning for you at school
    - Things that really bug you
    - Places you feel safe at school
    - Places you don't feel safe at school
  - o In home:
    - Who are you really
    - Things that you do that involve learning for you in your life out of school
  - o Suggestions?
- Summary of Procedure:
  - o Total of 8 weeks
    - Intro: Week 1 – Learning about the camera
      - Mon: 15min group meeting + individual meeting
      - Wed: 15min group meeting + individual meeting
      - Thurs: 30min individual meeting for photo interview
    - Photo Fun: Week 2-6 – Themed photography
      - Mon: 15min group meeting + individual meeting
      - Wed: 15min group meeting + individual meeting
      - Thurs: 30min individual meeting for photo interview
    - Photo Prep: Week 7-8 – Putting it all together for the photo exhibition
      - Mon: 30min individual meeting
      - Wed: 30min individual meeting
      - Thurs: 30min individual meeting

- Home portion: 2 weeks with 3 visits
  - 1<sup>st</sup> visit to give camera and explain (30min)
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> visit at end of first week to pick up camera and do interview, then give another camera (45min)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> visit at end of second week to pick up camera and do interview (30min)
- Feasibility
  - Time constraints
    - Meetings 3times per week?
    - Daycare and lunch time vs. class time
  - Teacher support for project
  - Physical space
- The Approach
  - To Students
    - We are curious about what it is like for kids at school
    - What do you think is important to know about life at school?
  - To parents and teachers
    - In order to understand how students are seeing school, especially after receiving individualized support to improve their experience
- Suggestions brought up during meeting:
  - Students choosing one photo per week to bring home and show parents
  - Providing option to have families opt into the home portion at a later date if they are unsure at first
  - Evaluation of the photo project
    - Teacher focus groups pre/post
    - Asking students about their experience of the project

## Appendix B

### INFORMATION SESSION MATERIALS

#### 1) PARENT CONSENT LETTER

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s)

I am a Master's of Child Studies Candidate from the Department of Education at Concordia University. I am interested in exploring children's perceptions of their lives as students, their teacher's perceptions of the students and their parent's perceptions as collaborative caregivers through photographic storytelling. This project will evaluate the impact of FSSTT services on children with behavioural concerns by exploring the strengths and issues that are seen as important to the individuals and their community.

When you consent to participate in this study, the following procedures will take place:

The data collection will take place over the spring of the 2013 school year. The following information will be collected:

- a)** The student's report card for the academic year
- b)** The student's individualized educational plan
- c)** Child photo-interviews and drawing sessions will be used to understand the children's perspectives of themselves as learners
- d)** Parent photo-interviews will be used to understand the parent's perspective as collaborative caregivers
- e)** Teachers and school personnel will be invited to partake in 2 focus groups ((February and May 2013) to give their views about these students as learners and discuss emerging themes about family-school collaboration, the goals of the school interventions and the impact of the services on students, parents, and teachers.

The children will participate in a 8 week photography project in the spring (February 2013-May 2013). Children will be interviewed about their photos at the end of each week by a research assistant. Themes will be assigned each week and will center on their learning experiences. Photo sessions will be done at the end of the day after school and will be audio-taped. Care will be taken to ensure that the children are not inconvenienced and disadvantaged by being taken out of class.

Parents will also be asked to participate in a two week photography project in the home, in the Spring of 2013 . There will be interviewed for about 45minutes at the end of each week's session. The interview will be audio-taped.

One of the potential benefits of this project is student empowerment. Photography is a tool that can help give a voice to the student's stories.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me, Cassandra Monette, at 514-265-2043 or Dr. Hariclia Petrakos at 514-848-2424 ext. 2013.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Monette

Project Researcher

Hariclia (Harriet) Petrakos, Ph.D.

Faculty Supervisor

## Appendix B

### 2) PARENT CONSENT FORM

My place in school: Following the impact of inclusive services for students with behaviour difficulties

#### ***CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH***

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by

Dr. Hariclia Petrakos of the Department of Education of Concordia University (telephone: 848-2424, ext. 2013; email: [hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca](mailto:hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca)). You may also contact Cassandra Monette, Masters of Child Studies Candidate of the Department of Education of Concordia University (telephone: 514-265-2043, email: [cassandra.monette@gmail.com](mailto:cassandra.monette@gmail.com))

#### **A. PURPOSE**

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is:

To evaluate the impact of FSSTT services on children with behaviour concerns. In addition, the aim is to reveal participating children's perceptions of their lives as students, their teachers' perceptions of the students, and their parents' perceptions as collaborative caregivers. It will identify the quality of relationships between students, parents, and teachers as well as the relationships between teachers and families of children with behavior concerns.

This information will help schools develop a positive climate for all students.

#### **B. PROCEDURES**

***I have been informed that the procedure is the following:***

The data collection will take place over the spring of the 2013 school year. The following information will be collected:

- a)** The student's report card for the academic year
- b)** The student's individualized educational plan
- c)** Child photo-interviews and drawing sessions will be used to understand the children's perspectives of themselves as learners
- d)** Parent photo-interviews will be used to understand the parent's perspective as collaborative caregivers
- e)** Teachers and school personnel will be invited to partake in 2 focus groups ((February and May 2013) to give their views about these students as learners and discuss emerging themes about family-school collaboration, the goals of the school interventions and the impact of the services on students, parents, and teachers.



The children will participate in a 8 week photography project in the spring (February 2013-May 2013). Children will be interviewed about their photos at the end of each week by a research assistant. Themes will be assigned each week and will center on their learning experiences. Photo sessions will be done at the end of the day after school and will be audio-taped. Care will be taken to ensure that the children are not inconvenienced and disadvantaged by being taken out of class.

I will also participate in a two week photography project in the home, in the Spring of 2013 . I will be interviewed for about 45minutes at the end of each week's session. The interview will be audio-taped.

### **C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity). All the information that all the participants share is also confidential and private, unless the children are unsafe in any way. In that case, any concerns will be reported to the school principal.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

*If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-7481 or by email at [areid@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:areid@alcor.concordia.ca).*

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_

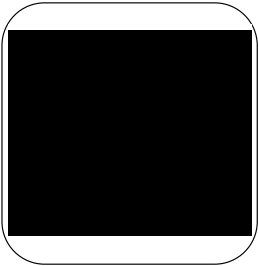
Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

3) PARENT CALENDAR

February

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4	5	6 Info Meeting!	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28		



# March

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 ← *Intro Week* →	2
3	4 March Break!	5 March Break!	6 March Break!	7 March Break!	8 March Break!	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
	← *Photo Fun Week 1* →					
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	← *Photo Fun Week 2* →					
24	25	26	27	28	29 Easter Break	30
	← *Photo Fun Week 3* → ~*Home Photos Week*~					
31						

← \*Photo Fun Weeks\* →

Mon: Photo meetings

Wed: Photo meetings

Thurs: Photo Interviews

~\*Home Photos Week\*~

1<sup>st</sup> visit: Instructions and camera

2<sup>nd</sup> visit: photo interview, new camera and instructions

# April

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Easter Break	2 Easter Break	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	<div>*Photo Fun Week 4*</div> <div>~*Home Photos Week*~</div>					
14	15	16	17	18	19 Ped Day	20
	<div>*Photo Fun Week 5*</div>					
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	<div>*Photo Prep Week*</div>					
28	29	30				
	<div>*Photo Prep Week*</div>					

← \*Photo Fun Weeks \* →

Mon: Photo meetings

Wed: Photo meetings

Thurs: Photo Interviews

← \*Photo Prep Week \* →

Mon: Prep meetings

Wed: Prep meetings

Thurs: Prep meetings

~\*Home Photos Week \*~

3<sup>rd</sup> visit: photo interview

# May

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
			← *Photo Prep Week* →			
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	← *Photo Prep Week* →					
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	← *Photo Prep Week* →					
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	
	Photo Exhibition!					

← \*Photo Exhibition! \* →

To be scheduled to everyone's convenience

← \*Photo Prep Week \* →

Mon: Prep meetings

Wed: Prep meetings

Thurs: Prep meetings

## Appendix C

### TEACHER CONSENT FORM

My place in school: Following the impact of inclusive services for students with behaviour difficulties

#### ***CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH***

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by

Dr. Hariclia Petrakos of the Department of Education of Concordia University (telephone: 848-2424, ext. 2013; email: [hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca](mailto:hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca)). You may also contact Cassandra Monette, Masters of Child Studies Candidate of the Department of Education of Concordia University (telephone: 514-265-2043, email: [cassandra.monette@gmail.com](mailto:cassandra.monette@gmail.com))

#### **A. PURPOSE**

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is:

To evaluate the impact of FSSTT services on children with behaviour concerns. In addition, the aim is to reveal participating children's perceptions of their lives as students, their teachers' perceptions of the students, and their parents' perceptions as collaborative caregivers. It will identify the quality of relationships between students, parents, and teachers as well as the relationships between teachers and families of children with behavior concerns.

This information will help schools develop a positive climate for all students.

#### **B. PROCEDURES**

***I have been informed that the procedure is the following:***

The data collection will take place over the spring of the 2013 school year. The following information will be collected:

- a)** The student's report card for the academic year
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- d)** Parent photo-interviews will be used to understand the parent's perspective as collaborative caregivers
- e)** Teachers and school personnel will be invited to partake in 2 focus groups ((February and May 2013) to give their views about these students as learners and discuss emerging themes about family-school collaboration, the goals of the school interventions and the impact of the services on students, parents, and teachers.

The children will participate in a 8 week photography project in the spring (February 2013-May 2013). Children will be interviewed about their photos at the end of each week by a research assistant. Themes will be assigned each week and will center on their learning experiences. Photo sessions will be done at the end of the day after school and will be audio-taped. Care will be taken to ensure that the children are not inconvenienced and disadvantaged by being taken out of class.

I will allow a research assistant from Dr. Petrakos' lab into my classroom to conduct the photography project with participating students

I will also participate in two audio recorded focus group interviews (February and May 2013).

### **C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION**

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity). All the information that all the participants share is also confidential and private, unless the children are unsafe in any way. In that case, any concerns will be reported to the school principal.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

*If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-7481 or by email at [areid@alcor.concordia.ca](mailto:areid@alcor.concordia.ca).*

## Appendix D

### FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

#### Teacher Focus Group Script

An open-ended group interview with teachers and school personnel focusing on perception of the students, themes about family-school collaboration, and the impact of the services received.

#### Perceptions of these students

*Tell me about the children you work with*

*What is it like in class?*

*How do you feel about them as learners?*

*What is the best thing about working with these students? The worst?*

#### Emerging themes about family-school collaboration

*Tell me about your experience with home and school relationships*

*How does family-school collaboration influence these children, if at all?*

#### Impact of the services on students, parents, and teachers

*Tell me about the program the students are receiving*

*Have you noticed any impact? If so, describe what you noticed*

*(for the students? Parents? Teachers?)*

*What do you feel is most valuable? Why? (for the students? Parents? Teachers?)*



### School Staff Focus Group Script

An open-ended group interview with teachers and school personnel focusing on perception of the students, themes about family-school collaboration, and the impact of the services received.

#### Perceptions of these students

*Tell me about the children you work with*

*What is it like working with them one on one?*

*How do you feel about them as learners?*

*What is the best thing about working with these students? The worst?*

#### Emerging themes about family-school collaboration

*Tell me about your experience with home and school relationships*

*How does family-school collaboration influence these children, if at all?*

#### Impact of the services on students, parents, and teachers

*Tell me about the program the students are receiving*

*Have you noticed any impact? If so, describe what you noticed*

*(for the students? Parents? Teachers?)*

*What do you feel is most valuable? Why? (for the students? Parents? Teachers?)*

## Appendix E

### PHOTO-INTERVIEW SCRIPT

#### Photo-Interviews

Open-ended interview with the child to gather data on the students' views on learning. At the end of each week the child will be asked to choose 5 photographs that are most important to them and will be asked to describe each.

The same open-ended interview will be used with the parents for their photographs.

Sample prompts:

*Tell me about this photo*

*What is this photo of?*

*Why is this picture important to you?*

*Why did you take this picture?/choose this picture?*

*Why do you like it?not like it?*

*How do you feel about this photo?*

*Who would you like to show this picture to?*

*What would you like them to know about this picture?*

## Appendix F

### INTRODUCTION SESSION SCRIPT

#### I-Click Suggested Script

- Step 1: Introductions/child assent
- Step 2: The plan
- Step 3: The camera
- Step 4: The pictures
- Step 5: The approach

#### Step 1: Introductions/child Assent for school portion

Hi! I'm Miss Cassandra, and this is Miss Lana. We are going to be doing a photography project together! Your mom/dad said that it is okay for you to take pictures and then meet with me. I am here to explain why we are meeting.

You will be meeting with me at lunch and after school as long as it is also okay with your parents and your teacher so that you can take pictures and talk about what it's like for kids at school. A little later on, I'll be coming to your home to give you a camera so you can take pictures at home with your family.

I'll also ask you questions about your pictures so that I can understand what you think and how you feel about the things you took pictures of. I will audio-record things we talk about so that I don't forget (show them the recorder).

We're also going to work together to do a photo exhibition! This means that you will get to choose some pictures that you want to show people.

If you get tired you can take a break and then we can try again. You may decide to stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Everything that you say is private and it will not be told to anyone unless I think that you are not safe and you need help. Then I will tell you if I have to tell an adult.

Do you have any questions?

Do you want to meet with me to take pictures and talk a bit about them?

#### Step 2: The plan

##### *Monday Group*

I'll come to meet with you Monday after school and Wednesday at lunch to take pictures. We'll start by talking in a group about different ideas for the pictures you'll be taking during the week. Then I'll take you one at a time to go around the school to take pictures.

Thursday after school I'll come meet with you so that we can look through and talk about some of the pictures you took.

##### *Wednesday Group*

We'll come to meet with you Wednesday after school and Thursday at lunch to take pictures.

We'll start by talking in a group about different ideas for the pictures you'll be taking during the week. Then we'll take you one at a time to go around the school to take pictures.

Thursday after school we'll come meet with you so that we can look through and talk about some of the pictures you took.

### Step 3: The camera

Show the students the cameras they will be using. Explain how to turn it on, how to take a picture and how to see your pictures once you've taken them. If they have questions about effects, feel free to go through that with them.

### Step 4: The Pictures

You can take as many pictures as you would like during our photo meetings.

When we sit down to talk about the pictures closer to the end of the week, then you can choose 5-7 to talk about. And you can also choose one to bring home and show your mom or dad.

Oh and you know how in drama there is an audience? Well, at the end of the project when we have our photo exhibition, you are going to have an audience for some of your pictures. You don't have to show you're your pictures. You're going to get to choose the pictures you want to show your audience. Try and think about whom you want to show the pictures to.

There are a few rules that we have to remember when taking pictures:

- 1) You can't take a picture of someone that doesn't want their picture taken (elaborate if necessary with an example: if your friend is telling you they really don't want you to take your picture, then you have to be respectful and not take the picture)
- 2) If you take a picture of someone else, you need to get their permission before you can show it to your audience. You don't have to worry about this right now though. We will work it out together at the end.
- 3) You have to return the camera at the end of each meeting. You will give the camera back to either Miss Lana or myself so that we can save all your pictures on the computer.

### Step 5: The Approach

So like I said before, we are curious about what it's like for kids at school. What do you think is important to know about life at school? Who do you think should know about these things?

(See what ideas come out and just try and help develop them)

## Appendix G

### METHODS MINI MANUAL

(Used for data collection training)

Project Summary  
 Basic Breakdown  
 Summary of Procedures  
 Themes  
 Ethical Considerations  
 Materials

#### Project Summary

---

Visual storytelling is a media method used in research to capture and share the realities of people within a community. It is an action research method, allowing those participating to take on a more empowering role in the research.

In order to gain a deep understanding of the students' perspectives on learning and school engagement, this action research project is focused on a philosophy of community partnership. This translates into the community having an active role in the research process. It is not research on a community, but with a community. Those involved act as co-researchers, helping us to explore the strengths and weaknesses that are seen as important to the individuals and their community.

Photography captures their realities in a medium that is easily shared to raise awareness on the issues and strengths of the community. The in-depth interviews about the photographs taken creates a narrative that drives attention to the perspectives of the community, what is important, and why. Altogether, this project's goal is to give a voice to the student's stories.

#### Basic Breakdown

---

##### *Action research*

- Research with participants, not on participants; Participants as co-researchers
- Assumes the community has more access and understanding of the realities they live in than the researcher
- Working in partnership with the community allows for a richer understanding of perspectives
- Strengths and limitations are explored

##### *I-Click Project*

- Using photography as a communicative tool to tap into student perspectives of their learning experiences
- Using focus groups to explore community member perspectives (i.e. teachers, specialists, and T-team members) and evaluating the influence of photography program on the community.
- Raising awareness of perspectives may lead to the potential for positive change
- **The aim:**

- Exploring how students with EBD perceive their learning experiences at school.
- Exploring how their home environments and relationships impact their learning and school engagement

#### *Researcher's Role*

- Creating a trusting and collaborative platform for the exploration of community perspectives
- Supporting students through their self-reflective journey
- Aiding in the development of student ideas
- Aiding in the moderation of community discussion
- Providing materials and training

#### Summary of Procedure

---

- Total of 8 weeks
  - Intro: Week 1 – Learning about the camera
    - Mon: 15min group meeting + individual meeting
    - Wed: 15min group meeting + individual meeting
    - Thurs: 30min individual meeting for photo interview
  - Photo Fun: Week 2-6 – Themed photography
    - Mon: 15min group meeting + individual meeting
    - Wed: 15min group meeting + individual meeting
    - Thurs: 30min individual meeting for photo interview
  - Photo Prep: Week 7-8 – Putting it all together for the photo exhibition
    - Mon: 30min individual meeting
    - Wed: 30min individual meeting
    - Thurs: 30min individual meeting
- Home portion: 2 weeks with 3 visits
  - 1<sup>st</sup> visit to give camera and explain (30min)
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> visit at end of first week to pick up camera
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> visit to do interview, then give another camera (45min)
  - 4<sup>th</sup> visit at end of second week to pick up camera
  - 5<sup>th</sup> visit to do interview (30min)
- Teacher portion: pre/post focus groups
  - 1<sup>st</sup> focus group at the beginning of I-Click project
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> focus group at the end of I-Click project

#### Themes

---

- In school:
  - What is really important to you in your life
  - Things that involve learning for you at school
  - Things that really bug you
  - Places you feel safe at school
  - Places you don't feel safe at school
- In home:
  - Who are you really
  - Things that you do that involve learning for you in your life out of school

### Ethical Considerations to Display Photographs

---

Taking photographs of other people involves a level of ethical consideration that may be difficult for some children to follow. In light of this, children will be explained that they are able to take pictures of whomever they choose as long as the person agrees. Once it comes time to choose which pictures they would like displayed, they will then have to get written consent from the person in that picture.

### Materials

---

- Cameras for kids at school would be digital
- At home cameras would be disposable
- Audio-recorder
- Computer
- USB key to transfer pictures